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How Small School Districts Can Organize to Afford Their Small Schools

Christine Burton
Seton Hall University

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**HOW SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICTS CAN ORGANIZE
TO AFFORD THEIR SMALL SCHOOLS**

BY

CHRISTINE BURTON

Dissertation Committee

Charles Achilles, Ed.D., Mentor

Michael Osnato, Ed.D.

James Caulfield, Ed.D.

Roberta Schorr, Ph.D.

Submitted in a Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education
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2005

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Doctoral Candidate, **Christine Burton**, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the **Ed.D.** during this **Summer Semester 2005**.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE
(please sign and date beside your name)

Mentor:

Dr. Charles Achilles

C. M. Achilles

4/21/2005

Committee Member:

Dr. Michael Osnato

Michael Osnato

4-21-2005

Committee Member:

Dr. Roberta Schorr

Roberta G. Schorr

4/21/2005

Committee Member:

Dr. James Caulfield

James E. Caulfield

4/21/2005

External Reader:

Associate Dean

The mentor and any other committee member, who wish a review to recommend revision, will sign and date this document only when revisions have been completed. Please return this form to the Office of Graduate Studies, where it will be placed in the candidate's file.

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Thanks to my Dad, Mom, Joann, and Mike, my sisters Kathy, Betty Jo, and Connie, my brother, Joey, and their families whose love and encouragement also helped me to finally complete this work.

Dedication

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. ~

Philippians 4:13

The wonderful power of prayer and faith in God sustained me to persevere through this process. I want to thank God for His unfailing love.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents Joseph J. and Joann Gatto, whose love and guidance from the beginning of my education have made this possible. This is in memory of my Dad, who many years ago said to me that he would do whatever it took to help pay for college. My Mom's many care packages got me through those undergraduate years and the many graduate years that followed.

This is also dedicated to my husband, Rich, my two daughters Olivia and Adriana and my Mother-in-Law, Leona who truly know the sacrifices that were made to help me to finally finish. Thank you and I love you for all your patience and support. I hope that my work will be an inspiration to my daughters.

Abstract

While the research continues to mount on the benefits of school downsizing and decentralizing efforts in urban areas, there exists a paradox for small school Administrators who continue to struggle against forces of consolidation. Small schools in rural and suburban districts have fought for their existence against the pressures of consolidation or regionalization based on the claim that “bigger is better” and with decisions based on factors not judged on their educational merit, but rather on factors that were political, economic, demographic, or social.

The purpose of the study was to explore the benefits of small schools regarding academic achievement, attendance, graduation rates, and dropout rates; to identify how small schools and small districts have used organizational practices and strategies toward cost containment and competitive curricula and to recommend those effective and efficient practices offering fiscal and programmatic viability for small schools. The researcher examined the effective financial and educational strategies that have been implemented in small schools.

The analysis generated descriptive statistics of each small school yielding the academic achievement, extra-curricular participation, and attendance rates of students consistent with the literature in that standardized test performance was equal or superior to District Factor Group comparisons. Other common benefits were the atmosphere of safety and trust where there was a sense of community fostered by parental involvement, communication, and relationships with families. Participants in focus group and one-on-one interviews were in agreement that communities benefited by having small schools serve as the hub of the community with the challenges of limited resources, S1701,

administrative cost penalties, and fears of regionalization or consolidation. Efforts to provide competitive curricula included cluster district articulation, use of computers for on-line courses, inter-district collaboration, and a five year curriculum cycle.

Participation in education consortia, share services agreements, the School Choice Program, establishment of education foundations, and the use of multi-age classrooms were cited as measures to contain costs by small schools. The existence of small schools as beneficial to students and communities was affirmed, and these organization and financial practices can provide policy makers with further leverage for small schools as a viable school reform.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“If classrooms [*sic*] and schools are to be places where students’ personal and learning needs are met, they should be small” (cited in 2002, p. 6). Beyond their educational function, schools serve as a focal point for community life. The latest research and education literature have documented the overwhelming benefits of small schools over their larger school counterparts on a number of measures and equal on others. Raywid (1999) asserted that the superiority of small schools has been “established with a clarity and at a level of confidence rare in the annals of education research”(p. 1).

Small school districts have had several different types of configurations. A single small school in some towns constituted a small school district. Other small schools districts have two or more small schools. A third type of small school district may have larger schools in addition to a small school within it. For this study, the reference to a small school district referred to any of the three configurations containing one or multiple small schools.

Among the core research findings (Ayers, 2000) were that the move to small schools and small classes was deep rooted in the belief that knowing students intimately and encouraging them to participate was key to educational outcomes. The growing consensus centered on factors such as raising student achievement, reducing violence, combating student isolation, and increasing attendance and graduation rates. Coincidentally, small schools have been found to provide these levels of superior educational results with no greater expense per graduate than do larger schools according

to the Small Schools Workshop at the University of Illinois-Chicago. These education results, as measured by standardized achievement and other performance indicators, were at higher levels than for students in larger schools. Cushman (as cited in Cotton, 2001) wrote that teachers note students who have internalized the importance of the curriculum. “These things are not testable, but in small schools, they are certainly observable”(p. 13).

The benefits of small schools were borne out by the number of studies that investigated the new generation of small schools. Among the variety of school types to surface were small learning communities, school-within-a-school, schools-within-schools, and theme-based schools. Between 1940 and 1990, the total number of elementary and secondary schools in the United States declined 69% - from 200, 000 to 62,037 – despite a 70% U.S. population growth. As a result, the average school size (school population) rose more than five times – from 127 to 653 students (Cotton, 1996; Mitchell, 2000). In today’s urban high schools, enrollments of 2,000 or 3,000 are common, with some schools warehousing as many as 5,000 students. It should, therefore, leave no wonder why the numbers of new small schools have escalated during the past ten years in cities such as Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Seattle, and Oakland.

As part of this growing initiative, government, university, and private sources have offered much-needed funds to initiate these small urban high schools. In September, 2003, the Gates Foundation pledged \$51 million to create 67 of the new-style high schools in New York City alone (Toch, 2003). The nearly \$700 million in donations from the Gates Foundation to states, school systems, and nonprofit organizations was slated to create 1,400 mostly urban high schools with enrollments of 400 students or

fewer. In just under four years, the Foundation drastically changed the notion of “bigger is better” with regard to high schools by moving to a smaller and more personal model. These three factors-- research findings on the effectiveness of small schools, the proliferation of new small schools in urban areas, and the current availability of grant money to stimulate further downsizing-- have offered hope to those who believe that small schools are a powerful means of improving education (Cotton, 2001, p. 2).

A recent report by the National Association of Secondary School Principals or NASSP (2004), *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform*, was a follow-up to its seminal 1996 report *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*. The report was written as a field guide for high school principals and their leadership teams wishing to make their schools more student-centered and rigorous. Among its recommendations for improving student learning was to focus on the personalization of students. It cited creating smaller learning communities by developing new small high schools, helping large schools create schools-within-schools, and raising public awareness about the benefits of personalized learning environments (NASSP, 2004).

Researchers who have studied the many facets of small schools warn that reducing school size alone does not necessarily lead to improved student achievement. Fine and Somerville (1998) asserted that as the research has clearly shown, school size does matter. However, they were quick to point out that small is no “silver bullet” (cited in Cotton, 2001, p. 5). Rather, “‘small’ was simply a vehicle for doing other rigorous, accountable work” (quoted in Gewertz, 2001, p. 4). Raywid (1997) theorized that, “It’s not size alone that creates the benefits of small schools. It is the personalization and responsiveness and the sense of community that smallness and less formal structures

permit” (p. 20). What has been prevalent in the research was that school size should be seen as having an “indirect effect” on student learning by facilitating other desirable practices. Said differently, opportunities to promote collegiality among teachers, personalized teacher-student relationships and constructivist teaching were easier to implement in small, rather than large schools (Visher, Teitelbaum, & Emanuel, 1999). Despite the current research and literature in support of the effectiveness of small schools, the determinants of school size were not often enough the result of such research. Williams reported that school size is the result of political, economic, social, and demographic factors (quoted in Cotton, 1996).

Statement of the Problem

While the research continues to mount on the benefits of school downsizing and decentralizing efforts in urban areas, there exists a paradox for small-school administrators who continue to struggle against forces of consolidation. Small schools in rural and suburban districts have fought for their existence against the pressures of consolidation or regionalization based on the claim that “one big school is better (and more cost efficient) than two smaller schools” (Nelson, 1985, p. 1).

Gregory (2000) outlined that research on school size (particularly in high schools) had developed into four forms:

- a) early sociological discussions;
- b) studies of school costs as input studies;
- c) ethnographic portrayals and observations of what is going on in schools;
- d) studies of achievement and graduation rates as output studies.

The problem for the researcher in this study was to examine the current research on the benefits of small schools to students and the community to offer policy makers and administrators' fiscal viability and curricular options for small schools embodying the economy of scale that can be attained by effective and efficient large schools. By bringing the four above forms together to create a descriptive model of organization and financial practices, could policy makers realize the real benefits of small schools as a reputable school reform?

The conceptual framework for this investigation is shown in Figure 1. The literature and research suggest that organization practices of small schools exist among the educational cooperatives available to all school districts. The framework's focus –the organization practices of small school as a viable reform effort in configuring schools – is represented by the inputs (of which costs and curricula are part), the organization practices being implemented in small schools, and the outputs (based on quantitative and qualitative measures).

One measure of the economy of scale in schools translated into fewer schools with greater numbers of students. The movement to consolidate schools was said to have been greatly accelerated by Conant's (1959) book, *The American High School Today*. Conant, a noted scientist, argued that a high school should have at least 100 students in its graduating class in order to be cost effective and to offer an adequately large and varied curriculum. He claimed that small high schools were the number-one problem in education and should therefore be eliminated (as cited in Cotton, 1996; Mitchell, 2000).

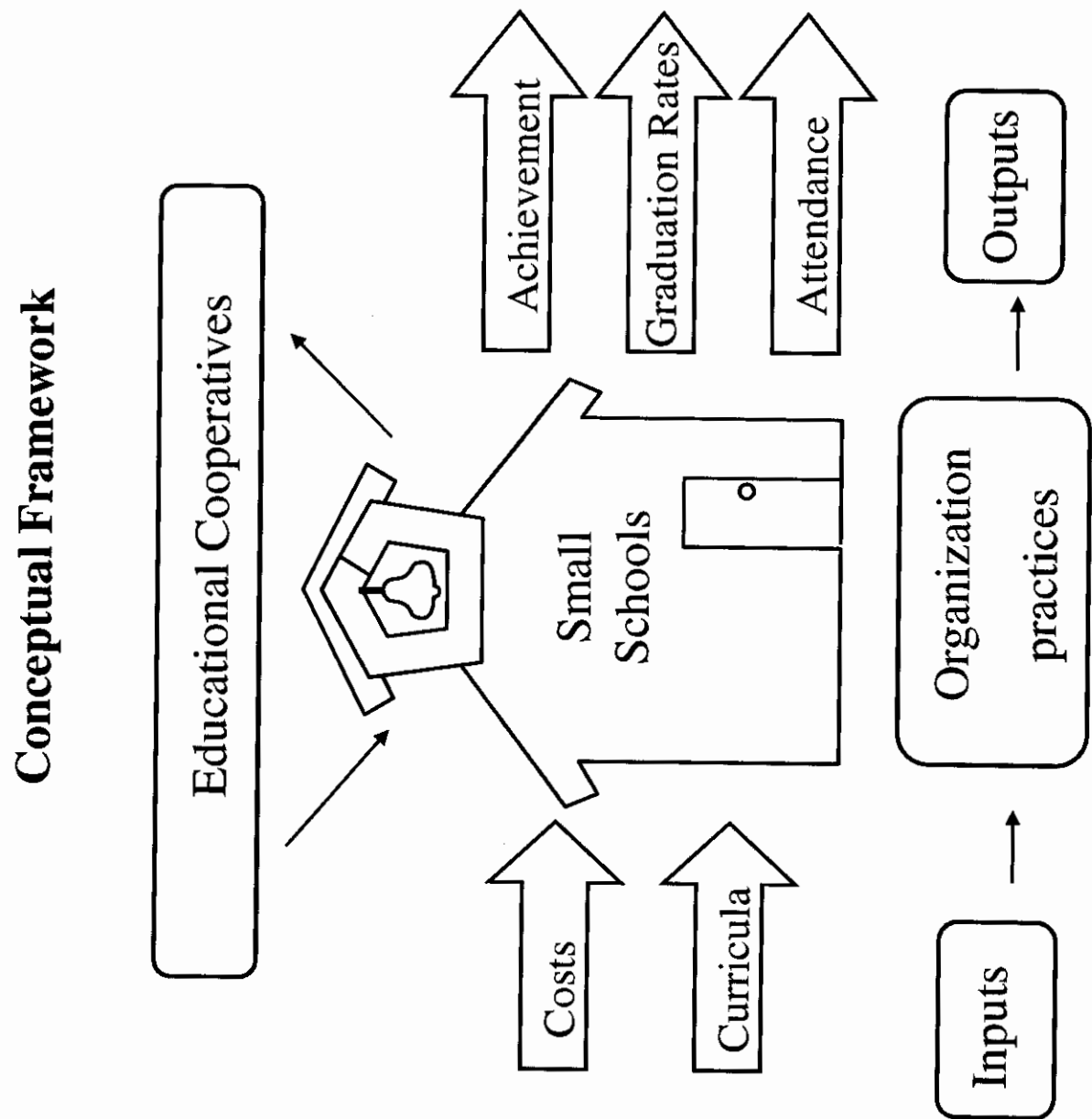


Figure 1. The conceptual framework used in the present study.

Closing small schools in New Jersey has been on the front burner of the New Jersey State Department of Education (NJDOE) for years. In his January 13, 2004 “State-of-the-State” speech, then- Governor James McGreevey proposed the elimination of 23 school districts that have no schools and the consolidation of services in another 172 small districts. The arguments against small schools have centered largely on costs.

In a study of new small schools in New York City, researchers concluded that the cost per student graduated offered a resounding validation for small schools. That is, by examining another measure of economy of scale, the graduation rate and the “cost per student graduated”, small schools with a much higher graduation rate were found to be the most economical of all (Stiefel, Berne, Iatarola, & Fruchter, 2000). Beyond costs, the other argument leveled against small schools has been their inferior curricula as compared to those of large schools.

Roellke’s (1996) work on curriculum adequacy and quality found that overall core curriculum courses in small schools were well aligned with the national standards. In the areas of mathematics and science, courses in high schools of 100 to 200 students were comparable to high schools enrolling 1,200 to 1,600 students. Roellke (1996) wrote that, “large size is no guarantee that [additional] courses will be offered or that student enrollments in the courses will be high” (p. 2). Although large schools may offer more courses, these additional courses only benefit a small percentage of students. Haller (1990) and others have challenged the argument for school consolidation alleged by the inadequacy of the curriculum. They wrote, “why the state should have an overriding interest in consolidating schools so that a few students are able to study calculus, physics, and a fourth year of German- to say nothing of rock poetry- eludes us” (p. 118).

The research on small schools pointed to the benefits on a number of fronts, yet small schools in all settings continued to function with bated breath as they waited to hear that they had been recommended to close. To offer these schools viable solutions to their threat of closure, it is important to look to those effective small schools to ascertain how they have been able to excel at the virtues of a small school.

Purpose of the Study

In this study, the researcher looked beyond the existing research on school size and achievement in an attempt to compare educational cooperation practices in New Jersey schools to those identified in the research. This research included the implications of strategies and tactics used by budget managers and education leaders of small schools in hurdling community-based struggles of cost containment and maintenance of fiscal viability while providing a quality education for all students.

This study had several purposes:

- a) to examine the benefits (outputs) of small schools regarding academic achievement, attendance, graduation rates, and dropout rates,
- b) to identify how small schools and small districts in New Jersey and elsewhere have used organizational practices and strategies toward cost containment and competitive curricula.
- c) to recommend to superintendents, principals, and boards of education members those effective and efficient practices (input) offering fiscal and programmatic viability for small schools.

Research Questions

In this study, the researcher attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the benefits of small schools for students with respect to academic achievement, attendance, graduation rates, and dropout rates?
2. What benefits do small schools provide to their communities?
3. What challenges do small schools face in maintaining fiscal viability and competitive curricula?
4. What organizational practices and strategies have small school administrators used in an effort to contain costs and to provide competitive curricula?
5. How can school district administrators organize, operate, and communicate to afford the benefits of small schools while utilizing the economy of scale?

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by the following factors:

1. Overcoming the biases inherent in the varied sources used to document the work.
2. The rationale and motivations for the organizational practices used by the small schools.
3. The scope and research design developed by the researcher limit generalization.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was delimited to the following factors:

1. The research was delimited to the responses of the superintendents, business administrators, principals, assistant principals, and school board officers in the studied schools.

2. The schools were delimited in size to those with enrollments of approximately 400 students or fewer.
3. The study was delimited to schools in New Jersey and other purposefully selected sites.
4. The results were limited to professionals in small schools in New Jersey in order to make comparisons to New Jersey data.

Significance of the Study

This examination of the positive outcomes of small schools and the organizational practices used by their education leaders is an important issue in education and contributed to our knowledge of small schools. A finding in the report of a New Jersey Task Force on School District Regionalization (Malone et al., 1999) recognized the beneficial outcomes of small schools when the report cited, “Small school districts can produce excellent results and should not be regionalized simply because their enrollment falls below a certain number” (p. i). Therefore, as decision makers consider financial and educational options, maintaining small schools and small school districts may need to be at the forefront of viable reforms.

Among the financial concerns of small school administrators was the passage of the New Jersey Legislative Bill S-1701. The Bill has impacted not just small schools districts, but all size school districts with respect to budgeting and reserving surplus funds. Budget managers in school districts across the state will need to find additional means of containing costs to stay within the spending restrictions. The cost containing practices that have been prevalent in small school districts can offer larger districts with additional fiscally prudent options.

The research and literature on the positive outcomes of small schools in relation to achievement, graduation rates, dropout rates, participation in extra-curricular activities, violence and safety, parent involvement and satisfaction, and teacher attitudes were legion (Cotton, 2001; Cushman, 1999; Raywid, 1999; Wasley, 2002; Wasley et al., 2000). These positive outcomes were found throughout students' small school experience, as well as in later life. Yet, consolidation advocates and government officials continue to argue for the economic advantages of merging small districts without any clear indications that education quality improves with an increase in scale. The reality may be quite the contrary. Researchers have documented overwhelmingly that any advantages of closing small schools are outweighed by the academic performance and achievement of students learning in a small-school environment (Lyson, 2002, p. 2).

Beyond the education detriments to student performance, school consolidation had damaging effects on the communities in which they existed. For example, Sell and Leistritz (1996) reported that the impact of school consolidation had an immediate effect on students; however, the impacts on the communities both socially and economically, took place over a span of several years.

Researchers analyzing the economies of scale in education cited the importance of developing a general conceptual framework based on the theoretical foundation of education production and costs. The framework included the input and output decisions of individual schools and school districts (Andrews, Duncombe, & Yinger, 1995). Inputs and outputs are generally measured in per pupil measures. These inputs were based on per pupil expenditures. The output measures were usually in the form of performance measures such as achievement tests, dropout rates, and graduation rates. Caldas (1993)

described input factors as those that affect school achievement over which the school had little or no control. Change or process factors have been defined as those over which educators in schools did have control. According to researchers (as cited in Caldas, 1993; Jencks et al., 1972), it was estimated that input factors, which comprised demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the student body and of the school itself, explained as much as 50% or more of student achievement outputs (p. 206). Similar to Gregory (2000), output factors were measured by student achievement through formal testing, in addition to graduation rates. These variables or factors were key to educators and administrators, who were faced with implementing school reform choices. These types of factors were examined through the empirical studies and literature review for this study.

The understanding of the importance that a small school had on students' education performance and on their existence in communities was vital to all stakeholders of the school. The knowledge was of particular significance to those making educational decisions for the school. The main audience for this study was school administrators and educators. Administrators of small schools need to be at the leading edge of small school issues in relation to their significance to educating our children and in supporting their communities. The researcher undertook an in-depth examination of the effective financial and educational strategies that building-level and central-office administrators have implemented in small schools. The analysis generated descriptive statistics and relied on data from document analyses, focus group and one-on-one interviews, and informal policy and professional methods for collecting data from participants. Focus

groups were conducted in the small schools providing a natural setting (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

By studying the organizational practices and strategies of current administrators in small schools, the researcher hoped to identify and recommend the most promising efforts to the leaders and educators of all small schools. The study was most relevant for those individuals who are responsible for the planning and organizational structuring for their schools. In order to maintain the existence of small schools, administrators and educators needed to be equipped with organizational strategies capable of maintaining the education and financial viability of their small schools.

Definitions of Terms

- **Advanced Proficient (NJ ASK, GEPA, HSPA):** See scale scores
- **Autonomous small school:** In this study, autonomous small school was in its own building or in a building with another school(s), but is organizationally, fiscally, and instructionally independent. Ideally, defined as one that controls, not only its structure, budget, and learning program, but also a) establishes its transportation and school-day schedule; b) has its own teachers and students, c) has its own classroom space; and d) its use of space and time cannot be infringed upon (Cotton, 2001).
- **Central or regional high school:** In this study, a central high school or regional high school referred to a high school serving two or more districts.
- **Chief School Administrator:** In this study, a Chief School Administrator refers to the superintendent or administrative principal of a local district as set

forth in N.J.A.C. 6:3-2.1, or the state district superintendent in the case of a state-operated school district (NJDOE, 2002).

- **Choice School:** See Interdistrict School Choice Program.
- **Community:** In this study, community referred to the collection of individuals who are bonded together by natural will and who are together bound to a set of shared ideas and ideals. This bonding is tight enough to transform them from a collection of “I’s”: into a collective “we” (Sergiovanni, 1996).
- **District Factor Grouping:** In this study, District Factor Group (DFG) is a system that provides a means of ranking schools by their socio-economic status (SES). The grouping designation is based on information available from the census and includes the following: percent in community with no high school diploma; percent with some college; occupations; population density; income; unemployment; and poverty. There are eight groupings starting with A which designates the lowest socio-economic level and includes B, CD, DE, FG, GH, I, and J. These groupings allow comparison of districts with similar profiles for purposes of state aid and assessment information (NJDOE, 2002).
- **Economy of scale:** In this study, economy of scale referred to larger units being use staff and other resources more efficiently. Derived from the factory model of reduction in production cost by increasing the size of the facility (Cotton, 2001).
- **Interdistrict School Choice Program:** In this study, the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program (School Choice Program) was a New Jersey State

Department of Education program designed to increase educational opportunities for New Jersey students and their families by providing students with the option of attending a public school outside their district of residence without cost to their parents (NJDOE, 2002).

- **Partial Proficient (NJ ASK, GEPA, HSPA):** See scale scores
- **Proficient (NJ ASK, GEPA, HSPA):** See scale scores
- **Scale Scores:** In this study, scale scores that are reported on the NJ ASK (Grades 3&4), GEPA, and HSPA Language Arts and Mathematics scores are reported as scale scores with a range of 100 to 300. The range is considered a theoretical floor and ceiling respectively and may not actually be attained as a score. The scale of 250 is the benchmark score between Proficient students and Advanced Proficient students. The scale score of 200 is the benchmark score between Proficient students and Partially Proficient students. The score ranges are as follows (NJDOE, 2004a, 2004b):
 - **Advanced Proficient/Passing:** 250-300
 - **Proficient/Passing** 200-249
 - **Partially Proficient/Not Passing** 100-199
- **School consolidation:** In this study, school consolidation was defined as the practice of combining two or more schools for educational or economic benefits (Cotton, 2001).
- **School regionalization:** In this study, school regionalization or the creation of regional school district was when the boards of education of two or more local districts, or the board of education of a consolidated district, or of a

district comprising two or more municipalities, and the commissioner or his representative, after consultation, study and investigation, shall determine, that it is advisable for such districts to join and create, or for such district to become: a) an all purpose regional school district for all the school purposes of such districts or district, or b) a limited purpose regional school district to provide and operate, in the territory comprised within such local districts or district, one or more of the following: elementary schools, junior high schools, high schools, vocational schools, special schools, health facilities or particular educational services or facilities N.J.S.A. 18A:13-34 (NJDOE, 2002).

- **School-within-a-school:** In this study, a school-within-a-school (SWAS) operated within a larger “host” school, either as the only SWAS in that school or one of several. SWAS represent different degrees of autonomy but have their own personnel and program, and their students and teachers are self-selected.
- **Small Learning Community:** In this study, any separately defined, individualized learning unit within a larger school setting. Students and teachers are scheduled together and frequently have a common area of the school in with to hold most or all of their classes (Cotton, 2001).
- **Small school:** In this study, the definition of small, although it has not been clearly defined by researchers, was defined by general consensus with a limit of 400 for elementary schools and fewer than 500 for high schools (Cotton, 2001).

- **Small school district:** In this study, the definition of small school district referred to a) a district with only one school, which was a small school, or b) a district with one or more small schools.
- **Superintendent:** In this study, the definition of a Superintendent (referred to as a Chief School Administrator in some small schools) was the administrative principal of a local district as set forth in N.J.A.C. 6:3-2.1, or the state district superintendent in the case of a state-operated school district (NJDOE, 2002).
- **Theme or Theme-based school:** In this study, theme or theme-based school (also referred to as a focus school) was a type of new, autonomous, small urban school that was created with a “focus” around which a common interest has been established by teachers and students (Cotton, 2001).

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter II provided an extended review of selected literature, empirical studies, and research concerning the positive outcomes of small schools, issues of cost effectiveness, and their organization. Chapter III provided an explanation of the methodology and procedures used to collect the data and to conduct the study. The synthesis of selected research, literature, and new data are presented in Chapter IV. The discussion, implications, and recommendations from the study and for further research are presented in Chapter V.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF RELEVANT RESEARCH AND LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter includes a review of the research and relevant literature on the topic of study. It is presented in five sections. First, a background section summarized a history of small schools. In a second section, the benefits of small schools for students who attend them are explored. Benefits are also addressed in relation to those afforded to the communities in which the small schools existed. In the third section, the researcher explores how administrators and education professionals organize schools and in particular, how the evolution of small schools and small learning communities became a reform alternative in schools. The fourth section discusses the funding and containment of operating cost in small schools. The chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter.

Historical Perspective of Small Schools

The image of the one room schoolhouse brings to mind the nostalgic era of early American life. These schools played an important role in educating many generations of American youth in the traditions and values of our forefathers. These schools were quite often small in size and in rural areas as a centerpiece of the settler communities.

Barker (1986) noted that recognition should be given to those who have gone on to be successful in their professions in business, science, education, and other venues who have reaped the positive outcomes of a public education in a small school. The origins of many of the education “innovations” of today have their roots in small-school classrooms. These include non-graded classrooms, individualized instruction, low

student/teacher ratios, cross-age grouping, using the community as a resource, peer tutoring, and “mainstreaming” of mildly handicapped pupils.

Most rural schools were small, characterized in areas with open countryside and in population centers of under 2,500 people (Claycomb, Louie, Bogden, & Kysilko, 1996). Small schools, however, were not necessarily found in rural areas. With an inquiry as to whether the benefits of small schools were attributed to ruralness, rather than smallness, investigators sought to examine the two. The research reported that smallness, regardless of the setting, was beneficial (Stockard & Mayberry, 1992; Walberg, 1992). Walberg (1992) wrote that even by discounting the positive effects of a rural location, smaller high schools yielded greater achievement and years of attained education after high school. Thus, smaller schools showed long-range effects independent of rural advantages (p. 10). For the purpose of this present study, no distinction is made between rural and traditional small schools.

Small schools, coincidentally, had been the model for schools in the United States until the middle of the 20th century. According to national statistics, in 1930, approximately 262,000 U.S. public schools educated 26 million students. The number of schools decreased to approximately 90,000 U.S. public schools, while educating over 47 million students (Snyder, 2000). The debate over school size spanned the last four decades with contenders on either the “smaller is more intimate” or “bigger is better” side of the aisle.

The origin of the debate had its vestiges in the 1959 book, *The American High School Today*, by noted physicist, James Bryant Conant. Conant (1959) asserted that a comprehensive high school must be large enough to offer a broad enough curriculum to

prepare students for college and to eliminate the prohibitive expense to taxpayers. He wrote that, one problem was the elimination of the small high school by district reorganization (p. 38).

The reorganization of schools dealt largely with the concept of school and school district consolidation. The logic for school consolidation originated from an idea born in the late 19th century industrial era. “Economy of scale”, according to Fanning (1995), was the idea that you can reduce your production cost by increasing the size of the production facility. Since that time and continuing still today, there are schools that have organizational structures based on the belief that education promoted greater social order using techniques adapted from industry (Orr, 1992).

The trend of school consolidation of one-room schoolhouses began in 1918 as perceptions of academic weakness in rural and small schools grew. By consolidating schools, school districts sought to expand the curriculum while reducing costs through economy of scale. Ravitch (1984) reported that while total enrollment in elementary and secondary schools nearly doubled (23 million to 40 million) during the years 1945 to 1980, the number of schools declined from 185,000 to under 86,000 or a decrease of 53.5%. The decade of the 1970s marked a decrease in U.S. schools by 5% (Ravitch, 1984).

The authors of the book, *Big School, Small School: High School Size and Student Behavior* (B. Barker, 1986; R. G. Barker & Gump, 1964) challenged the notion that larger schools were better. They concluded that smaller schools offered students more opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities as they were “undermanned” and had less competition as compared with large high school counterparts. Students,

therefore, were more likely to get involved in school activities in small schools and not get overlooked by being one in a crowd as in large schools. A natural consequence was that more was asked of everyone, especially students who were faced with new challenges to master. Recent research showed similar results in small schools providing higher levels of participation with greater roles and higher levels of satisfaction from those activities (Cotton, 1996, 2001; Hamilton, 1983; Kearney, 1994). Lindsay (1984) reported that students at smaller high schools were more likely participate in extracurricular activities than were their peers in larger schools and the size of the school had a stronger effect than other variables such as SES, academic ability, gender, sociability, curriculum track, and class rank. The organization size as a structural variable made a difference in student social participation in high school. Lindsay (1984) asserted that “there is apparently a lasting impact of this schooling process affecting social participation when these students become young adults increasing the salience of knowledge of these relationships” (p. 81).

Finn (1993) described the importance of student engagement as either behavioral or affective. The behavioral engagement depicted students’ level of participation in classroom or school activities. The degree to which students felt they belonged in the school setting and valued school-relevant outcomes measured students’ affective engagement. The affective component was found to play a key role in students’ overall participation in school and in long-term consequences such as truancy and dropping out of school.

Goodlad’s (1984), book, *A Place Called School*, put the burden of proof with large schools. He observed that the smallest schools were better able to solve problems,

provide an intellectual environment, support caring teachers, and provide greater student and parent satisfaction. According to Goodlad, “It is not impossible to have a good large school, it is simply more difficult”(p. 309). Fowler’s (1989) work echoed the findings of Barker and Gump. The study, conducted in New Jersey high schools, concluded that student outcomes were more favorable in smaller public schools as well as in smaller districts than in larger settings.

Benefits of Small Schools (Outputs)

Fowler (1992) contended that, “there is a natural predilection in American education toward enormity, and it does not serve schools well” (p. 1). Why had the issue of small schools gained such prominence in recent years and warranted such fervor for widespread research? Administrators, teachers, parents, and students associated with small schools have long known the benefits of small schools. Since the early 1980s, empirical studies have documented a large body of research in the affective and social realms overwhelmingly affirming the superiority of small schools (Cotton, 1996).

Wasley (2002), proposed that the issues of school size, as well as class size, have resurfaced due to the standards movement and empirical research. She asserted that the standards movement brought to the forefront that schools were largely inequitable places. According to Wasley (2002), “Unless we seek to change students’ learning opportunities, especially for students who are ill served by their schools, standards alone are unlikely to influence student learning” (p. 6).

In addition, Wasley referenced the accomplishments of cognitive scientists, neurological biologists, and educators in determining that all students have the capacity

to learn. Educators, therefore, needed to determine the strategies that would return gains for all students, in particular, to try to help those who have not done well in school. Foster and Martinez's (1985) research led them to conclude that student alienation was negatively correlated to student participation in co-curricular activities. In turn, the alienation affected confidence, self-esteem, and responsibility for self-direction (pp. 57-58).

Having both smaller classes and smaller schools influenced whether teachers were able to engage students toward building crucial citizenship skills (Wasley, 2002). Closely related to these assertions were the earlier findings of Rutter (1988) who looked at the needs of at-risk students in large high schools. Rutter found increases in social bonding to teachers and schools, self-esteem, and academic self-concept of students in smaller alternative programs rather than in large high schools.

Academic Achievement

In a review of the research of more than 100 studies, Cotton (1996) observed that student academic achievement in small schools was at least equal-to-- and often superior to-- that in large schools (p.13). These findings were drawn from large-scale quantitative and qualitative studies from around the country. These studies were conducted in Pennsylvania, Alaska, New Jersey, and an unidentified western state.

Fowler (1989) examined nearly 300 public secondary schools in New Jersey to identify relationships among school, pupil characteristics and school outcomes. The study's conclusions pointed to large school size as being negatively related to student achievement, participation in school activities, satisfaction, and attendance.

The standardized test scores of 13,000 students in Alaska were reviewed to determine that disadvantaged students in small schools significantly outperformed those in large schools (Huang & Howley, 1993). McMullan, Sipe, and Wolf (1994) examined the records of 20,000 students in Philadelphia to compare student performance. They concluded that high school students in small schools were more likely than those in large schools to pass major subjects and move forward toward graduation. In a study of 12,000 students in 800 high schools nationwide, researchers confirmed that students, particularly disadvantaged students, learned more in math, reading, history, and science in small schools than in large ones (Lee & Smith, 1994). Similar findings have also held for elementary school studies.

Kiesling (as cited in Fowler, 1995) concluded that a negative relationship existed between math and verbal ability and elementary school size ranging from 200 to 4,000 students, even controlling for socioeconomic differences. Holding constant income differences, Michelson (as cited in Fowler, 1995) found that larger elementary schools pointed negatively on student achievement in a study of 110 elementary schools enrolling 139 to 1,710 students.

In a longitudinal study of 7,000 students, Nye (1995) sought to analyze student achievement to determine if there was any effect of school size and the interaction of school size and class types based on an average teacher-student ratio. The findings indicated that the small class size with a teacher-student ratio of 1:15 was more important to student achievement in reading and small school size was more important to student achievement in mathematics. The researcher further found that the negative effect of

large school size on reading and mathematics achievement in all size classes became more evident as students progressed through grades K to 3.

In a study at the Bank Street College of Education (2000), researchers found that the relationship between school size and student achievement suggested that students' attachment, persistence, and performance were stronger in small schools. The researchers observed that compared to students in large schools, students in small schools:

- a) Have better attendance rates;
- b) Have significantly lower dropout rates;
- c) Have higher GPAs;
- d) Fail fewer courses;
- e) Have stronger achievement test scores;
- f) Are less likely to repeat a grade than their counterparts.

Quality of the Curriculum

Proponents of large schools argued that curriculum offerings were of higher quality than in small schools. Pittman and Haughwout (1987) found that "it takes a lot of bigness to add a little variety"; that was to say, "on the average, a 100% increase in enrollment yields only a 17% increase in variety of offerings" (p. 337). The research suggested that as the schools become larger, the strength of the relationship between school size and curricular options diminished. The enrollment increases of very small schools were associated with greater curricular gains than were increases in larger schools (Monk, 1992). Cotton (1996), cited studies which showed that smaller schools

were capable of offering core curricula comparable to larger schools. Small schools tended to be more flexible and exercise greater control over the curriculum than did larger schools.

According to Fowler (1992), very small schools have not offered as many advanced or specialized courses, but bigness did not guarantee breadth. Although researchers found that there were fewer advanced courses in the smallest high schools (Haller et al., 1990), large size was no guarantee that such courses were available or that the enrollments in these courses were high (Monk, 1986). A review of the school-size research on curriculum offerings delineated that there was no reliable relationship between school size and curriculum quality (as cited in Cotton, 1996; Fowler & Walberg, 1991; C. Howley, 1996; Monk, 1992; Pittman & Haughwout, 1987; Williams, 1990).

Student Attitudes

A plethora of research is dedicated to the study of the effects of small and large schools and student attitudes. According to Bryk and Driscoll (1998), individuals were involved with one another not merely because they are engaged on the same task, but because they were connected socially as well. Concerns about feelings and the welfare of students were addressed as part of everyday teaching. Students saw this as the teachers having an interest in their lives as well as in their academic achievements. Overwhelmingly, the research on the positive effects of student attitudes supported small schools over large schools (Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Walberg, 1991; C. Howley, 1996; Rutter, 1988).

Attendance

Findings in favor of small schools permeated the studies on student attendance. Barker and Gump (1964) found that student satisfaction and attendance were higher in small schools; attendance rates were higher in smaller schools as compared with large schools (Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Walberg, 1992). When students moved from large schools to small, alternative high schools their attendance rates increased (in Cotton, 1996; Rutter, 1988).

Dropouts

Using school data from the *High School and Beyond* study from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Pittman and Haughwout (1987) examined the impact of high school size on dropout rate. They determined that the increase in size of the student body corresponded to a similar rise in the school dropout rate. A 1998 comparison study (Funk & Bailey, 1999) of Nebraska rural and urban school graduation rates showed that rural schools, located in the least populated half of Nebraska counties, had a graduate to dropout ratio of 15.6:1 and graduated 2,209 students. Conversely, Lancaster county (Lincoln) had a 3.2:1 ratio and graduated 2,235 students, Douglas county (Omaha) had a 2.8:1 ratio and graduated 4,532 students, and Sarpy county (Omaha suburb) had a 18:1 ratio and graduated 1,347 students (cited in Moore, 2002). Thus, graduation rates in the small, rural schools were 6-8 times better as compared to the larger urban high schools.

Pittman and Haughwout (1987) offered the generalization that the dropout level of a high school increased at the rate of one percent for every 400 students added to its enrollment. In the vast majority of studies on education attainment, the pendulum

swung far in the direction in favor of small schools, whether measuring academic achievement, curriculum quality, student attitudes, graduation rates, or dropout rates.

Misbehavior and Violence

A study by Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993) found that the absence of disruption was a common characteristic of classroom life within small schools. Fewer than five percent of the teachers reported such infractions as: student fights in class, students under the influence of alcohol or drugs, physical or verbal abuse of students, students ridiculing other students, and excessive absences or tardiness. The majority of students expressed a sound interest in school and agreed that the school had a favorable reputation in the community.

Homans (1974) described group cohesiveness as “the value of the rewards that participation in the group provides for its members” (cited in Finn, Pannozzo, & Achilles, 2003, p. 348). In similar studies, Shaw (1976) found that in groups, which were friendly and cooperative with interpersonal attractiveness and group cohesiveness, a strong influence was exerted upon the group to act in accordance with the accepted expectations. In studies where researchers investigated cohesiveness and group size, they found that as the size of the group increased the students’ liking for the group and performance were diminished. Mullen and Cooper (1994) concluded that the “impact of the group cohesiveness is generally stronger among smaller groups” (p. 220).

The research indicated a direct correlation between small-school structure and the reduction, if not the elimination, of violent and disruptive student behavior. When students attended school where they were anonymous, more conflicts arose. A NCES

study reported that police or security officers were more prevalent in large schools as were other security measures such as metal detectors and random locker searches to maintain control. In larger schools, there was a dependence on external measures for controlling student behavior, but in smaller schools, student behavior was maintained by the engagement of faculty, school community, and students (Klonsky, 2002).

Meier insisted that small schools, “offer what metal detectors and guards cannot: the safety and security of being where you are known well by people who care for you” (as quoted in Klonsky, 2002). According to Meier (1998), students in small schools develop a strong sense of place and accountability. The term “psychological sense of community” (PSOC) was forwarded by Sarason (1974) as “the perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence by giving to or doing (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) for others what one expects from them, the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable stable structure” (p.157). PSOC within a community provided individuals with four major elements: “membership”, the feeling of belonging; “influence”, the sense of mattering to the group; “integration and fulfillment of needs,” the feeling that the community will meet the needs of the individual; and “shared emotional connection,” an emotional bond with other members of the community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Researchers studying PSOC have found that students’ sense of belongingness in school and identification with school were attributed to a variety of outcomes. The outcomes or student outputs were found in students’ motivation to perform well, to engage in learning activities, and to have high academic performance (as cited in Finn et al., 2003).

Watt (cited in Viadero, 2003) found that attendance in small middle and high schools could be harmful to the emotional health of students. According to Watt, male students in schools with 400 or fewer students were four times more likely to attempt suicide and have a higher incidence of depression than were males from larger schools. Fine, a professor at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York responded that often the small schools, outside of New York City, Chicago, and a few other big cities, were developed to provide alternative schooling to large school environments for troubled students who were unable to stay in regular schools.

Lower Socioeconomic Status (SES) Students

The group most profoundly affected by school size was the minority or low-socioeconomic status (SES) student. Studies in large schools on achievement of ethnic minority students and students of low SES found a more negative impact of large school size on these groups than on students in general (Fowler, 1995; Huang & Howley, 1993; Rutter, 1988; Stockard & Mayberry, 1992).

Fowler and Walberg (1991) investigated 293 public secondary schools in New Jersey, focusing on 18 school variables. Among these variables were student achievement, student retention, school size, district SES, and percentages of students from low-income families. The most influential and consistent factors related to student outcomes were SES and the percentage of students in low-income families.

Other factors that have attributable benefits from small schools included belongingness, self-concept, interpersonal relations, college variables, and teacher attitudes. Reviews of these topics are available in a number of studies (Cotton, 1996;

Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Walberg, 1991), and in each case these factors were more beneficial for students of small schools when compared to students of large schools.

Small School Benefits to the Community

Often overlooked was the important role that the community played in education. Nachtigal (1994) wrote that in small towns that still had a school, community members came to know the school as the hub of the community and a major resource for the town. Authors have written of the role of a healthy local culture through involvement in school affairs. Barker (1986) summed up the benefits of small schools in the following assertion: The strengths inherent in small schools clearly support characteristics and practices associated with findings emanating from “effective schools” research. The challenge facing administrators, teachers, parents, and students attending small schools is to capitalize on many advantages of smallness in order to provide the most meaningful education possible. (p. 4)

Berry (1993) defined a healthy community as, “a set of arrangements between men and women. These arrangements included marriage, family structure, divisions of work and authority, and responsibility for the instruction of children and young people” (in Fanning, 1995, p.3).

In a study of 297 New York communities described as villages with populations of 500 or fewer and 501 to 2,500, Lyson (2002) examined the characteristics associated with the presence or absence of a school. For the smallest rural communities, the presence of a school afforded the communities with appreciably higher housing values compared to similar communities without a school and other municipal services, such as

municipal water and sewer services. Differences were not as dramatic for larger rural communities; however, larger rural communities with schools ranked higher on nearly every indicator of social and economic well being than did larger rural communities without schools. Lyson (2002) concluded that schools served as important entities of social and economic viability and vitality. Money that might be saved in consolidation could be forfeited in lost taxes, declining property values, and lost business (p. 10).

Explanations for these phenomena were depicted in the existence of a two-prong approach to dealing with small schools. On the one hand, many quantitative and qualitative studies firmly found the beneficial qualities in and from small schools. On the other hand, those keeping the economy-of-scale view argue that larger units used staff and other resources more efficiently than smaller units (Howley, 1996). These two approaches lead to different suggestions about the most effective size for schools.

School Size

The research on school size did not definitively assign a value to the number of students to constitute a small school. Williams (1990) wrote that there was no clear agreement on the dividing line between small and large schools. Of the 103 studies Cotton (1996) examined, only 27 of the 69 key reports made mention of any numerical values in comparing school size. The size limits for small schools according to Williams (1990) averaged in the range of 300-400 students for an elementary and 400-800 students for a secondary school (p.7-8).

In defining the size of a small school, Meier (1998), offered an operational rather than numerical definition for school size:

It helps if schools are of a reasonable size, small enough for faculty members to sit around a table and iron things (such as standards) out, for everyone to be known well by everyone else, and for schools and families to collaborate face-to-face over time. Small enough so that children belong to the same community as the adults in their lives instead of being abandoned in adultless subcultures. Small enough to both feel safe and be safe. Small enough so that phony data can easily be detected by any interested participant. Small enough so that the people most involved can never say they weren't consulted. (p. 86)

The ability of small rural schools to deliver quality education programs was in question for decades. The appropriate size of a school district to offer a quality program has also fueled the size debate. Although the research and professional literature supported educating children in small schools, the consolidation trend continued to create large schools, perhaps because factors other than students' results represented the cogs in the wheels of decisions for policy makers. Factors that were political, economic, social, and demographic typically drove decisions about the size of schools. This trend captivated a wide audience and required a formidable effort to reverse, yet the research clearly and overwhelmingly indicated that it was a beneficial endeavor (Cotton, 1997).

Thus, from the multitude of reliable evidence substantiating the positive effects of small schools on student success, researchers declared that it was morally questionable not to act on it (Raywid, 1998). Berlin and Cienkus (1989) contended that school size could eventually prove to be the ultimate education issue (p. 1). Fowler (1995) explained that the research on the effects of school size at the public secondary level have been

virtually overlooked, except by the advocates of rural education looking to prevail against the push for school consolidation.

School Consolidation

Among the obstacles for small schools were the pressures of school consolidation. The issue of school consolidation was primarily focused on reducing costs and expanding the curricular and activity opportunities for students. State officials, local school boards, and administrators made recommendations for school and district consolidation under pressure to run schools efficiently and meet state and national standards (Fanning, 1995). The impetus for this movement toward consolidation has been traced back to the 1800s.

As early as the 1880s, policy makers and education leaders began calling for school consolidation in an effort to improve students' attendance in schools. However, with the limited means of transportation, such recommendations made little difference in attendance in the small rural schools. By the 1930s, innovations in transportation gave way to more consolidation of small schools (Howley & Howley, 2001). According to national statistics, between 1937 and 1950, public school districts decreased from approximately 119,000 to 71,000 and continued to decrease to the level of 14,859 districts in the year 2000-2001 (Snyder & Hoffman, 2002).

In August of 1981, the U.S. Secretary of Education, Terrel H. Bell, created the National Commission on Excellence in Education, with the mandate "to present a report on the quality of education in America" (NCEE, 1983). The report, *A Nation at Risk*, contained recommendations for education improvement as a result of the Secretary's concern about "the widespread public perception that something is seriously remiss in our

educational system" (p.2). Fanning (1995) wrote that *A Nation at Risk* and other reports prescribed the national goals for education. Coupled with the principles of economy-of-scale, these pressures equated to the large comprehensive high school with a number of feeder districts. In New Jersey, the number of small school districts downsized through the regionalization of schools.

The New Jersey Association of School Administrators (NJASA) issued a report (Lepore, 2004) from a comprehensive review of the research on regionalization and consolidation of school districts in the state of New Jersey. Lepore (2004) cited that since the 1969 Mancuso Report's recommendation that districts be forced to regionalize, with few exceptions, little if any money was saved by forcing school districts to consolidate or regionalize. While some districts might experience a savings, other districts would be forced to increase their taxes to pay the costs to regionalize or consolidate. The report concurred with the findings of researchers, (Gregory, 2000; Lyson, 2002) who defend that problems existed where states did not offer school districts incentives to make regionalization or consolidation fiscally viable (Lepore, 2004). Moreover, small districts administrators who were considering a downsizing option were informed that the costs for the regionalization or consolidation studies would be cost prohibitive due to administrative cost limitations.

A summary of finding in 12 studies in New Jersey school districts that underwent a regionalization and consolidation analysis reflected varied impact levels on the districts' budgets and tax rate. In the 12 studies of over 45 districts, 6 districts reported being potentially faced with larger budgets and residents in over half of the districts would have to pay higher taxes than if they remained an autonomous school district. In

addition, a school district had a smaller representation on a regional board than on a local board, therefore local control would be nonexistent (as cited in Lepore, 2004 p. 2). The findings (Malone et al., 1999) were in agreement with those of the 1999 New Jersey Assembly Task Force on School District Regionalization, that regionalization did not automatically reap major savings or improve the quality of education.

Costs of schools were the issue behind the July 2004 passage of the New Jersey Legislative Bill S-1701/A-99 (Senate, 2004). The legislation put restrictive spending caps and budgetary limitations on all school districts' budgets beginning fiscal year 2005.

The provisions of the Bill were outlined as follows:

- Reduced the current budget cap of 3% to 2.5% for the 2005-2006 budget year.
- Established a long-range plan to for administrative spending for 2005-2006 not to exceed the prior year per pupil administrative cost inflated by the cost of living or 2.5%, whichever is greater.
- Mandated that any reductions in spending to meet new budget caps be made in the area of excessive administrative spending or inefficient programs.
- Reduced by 50%, beginning with the 2004-2005 budget year, the amount a school district may "bank" and use to increase its budget cap in the succeeding two years.
- Reduced the amount of allowable surplus that may be maintained by a school district, other than a county vocational school district. Surplus in excess of 3% beginning in 2004-2005 must be appropriated.

Administrators and budget managers who attempted to oppose the legislation were made aware that the New Jersey Commissioner of Education had been authorized to enact “emergency” regulations to activate the law. There were no public hearings or formal processes for input into the regulations.

Economy of Scale

Barker and Gump (1986) proposed the “inside-outside perceptual paradox” which asserts that although larger schools were impressive on the outside, a better quality of education could be found inside smaller schools. Among the many arguments and notable efforts to advocate for large schools was that bigger schools offered economies-of-scale that not only increase learning, but also offered savings to taxpayers. However, data in studies in New York, California, and Illinois revealed that large schools often were actually more expensive to operate than small schools (Sergiovanni, 1995). Gregory (1992) pointed to the student/non-teacher ratio in a large Wisconsin high schools as being approximately 36 to 1 accounting for almost \$700 a year per student. As compared to the large high school, the structure and culture of the small high school studied required far fewer specialists.

Small Schools’ Operating Costs published by the Public Education Association or PEA (1994), reported no evidence to support the claim that large schools, of 1,500 to 4,000 students, achieved operational cost-scale efficiencies significant enough to justify their existence or to offset size-related, educationally damaged inefficiencies. Rather, the researchers found diseconomies of scale in large schools where extra layers of managers, subject supervisors, and assistant principals were needed. The PEA report (1994) also

showed that the construction of small schools of as few as 400 students were cost competitive with that of large schools.

In cost studies, Cohn (1975) concluded that based on a combination of quality factors and financial criteria, the optimum size of a high school was 1,653 students as of the 1970s. The small cost differences between large and small schools led some practitioners to suggest that basing school design decisions more on critical variables such as achievement was preferable for education and fiscal prudence reasons. Gregory (2000) interpolated the data provided by Cohn, indicating that a high school of 750 students would be only 18% less cost-efficient than the optimized school of 1,653 students. In 1975, a time when very large high schools were considered the economical way to educate, the notion of a high school of 1,600 students was less likely to be considered undesirable to a school half its size. Since the 1970s, the shift in the research findings and the most recent literature failed to cast any support to the generalization that big high schools cost less to run than do small high schools. Researchers of school costs (e.g. Stiefel et al., 2000) found no evidence that small was more expensive. This result was corroborated in *Dollars & Sense: The Cost Effectiveness of Small Schools* (Lawrence, 2002), where the analysis of cost per square footage for smaller schools was less than that of larger schools when combined with the allocation of square feet per student. The study (Lawrence, 2002) stood as a counterexample to the prevailing views that not only can smaller schools be constructed more cost efficiently, “but also that some school districts have actually made the rational choice to build smaller schools” (p. 20).

Findings, such as above diminished the argument for large schools, while lending support for small schools. Gregory (2000) reported that recent output studies including

(Stiefel et al., 1998, 2000) have found no evidence in the consistency of the early research that small schools were more expensive. The propensity of the research on the benefits of small schools has focused attention to be given to alternative strategies for school organization, which could develop quality education for students of small schools.

Organization of Schools

In districts where school consolidation was seen as the cure for the problems faced by small schools, often the disadvantages of consolidation and ill effects on the community residents of the small school were not thoroughly examined. Additionally, the objections by residents were frequently ignored (Monk & Haller, 1986; Rincones, 1988). Some external alternatives to consolidation have offered hope to administrators leading small schools but who are considering consolidation.

Partial Reorganization

Partial school reorganization allowed district leaders to respond to some financial issues related to decreasing enrollments, tight budgets, and increased federal and state mandates. This type of organization structure was flexible in that it could be changed to the preexisting condition if the restructuring was deemed inappropriate. This reorganization model included central high school districts, cluster districts, and exchange of students for tuition.

Central or regional high schools were formed when two or more districts combined high school programs while elementary schools were maintained. Monk and Haller (1986) found the advantages were that combining programs facilitated

reorganization where strong opposition to consolidation existed. The regional high school addressed the high school level where most problems occurred and only older students were bused. Parents still maintained local control by the elementary schools staying intact.

When district leaders decided to cluster or create union districts, there was a sharing and provision of services with academic programs to students of different schools by neighboring school districts. Cluster districts were formed to share science programs and materials, microcomputers, staff development, and in-service for administrators (Rincones, 1988). In addition to sharing supplies, schools sent middle and high school students to neighboring districts on a tuition basis. Small districts also took advantage of not needing to operate their own high schools. Sending students on a tuition basis to a neighboring school was facilitated through state intervention to tie the tuition a receiving district charged to the difference between its costs and the increased level of state aid generated by the higher enrollment (Monk & Haller, 1986).

Shared-Services

Through shared-services, neighboring school leaders agreed to share personnel, programs, and equipment to supply the necessary services to students. School districts remained separate and maintained their own identity while gaining additional curricular, administrative services, or other needed services. To provide an additional benefit to small schools, budget managers utilized shared-services for the expansion of programs, compliance with federal mandates, joint purchasing of expenditures, community cooperation and support, and school district stability (Rincones, 1988). The above-

mentioned alternative strategies were available to local school boards and school administrators in small school districts without resorting to full-scale reorganization.

Containing Operating Costs

Despite the research, districts continued to build school buildings that look more like malls than schools. The decisions for these types of structures were due in part to funding restrictions requiring additions rather than new schools, lack of available land for new schools, and resistance from communities that preferred a single large school (Kennedy, 2001). However, as Gregory (2000) pointed out, “A large and increasingly consistent body of research suggests that we should be moving, not toward larger high schools, but expeditiously toward smaller ones” (p. 2).

Based on the evidence for the learning and social benefits of small schools, government as well as private funding sources have offered millions of dollars to large high schools to create “small learning communities” (SLC) within existing buildings (Cotton, 2001).

As a school reform initiative, school systems have recognized the benefits of small schools and have sought the financial assistance of a myriad of sources to fund their efforts. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has invested millions in the creation of small high schools. In 2001, the Gates Foundation joined forces with the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Open Society Institute to form the New Century High School Consortium for New York City. The supporters planned to spend \$30 million over a span of five years to create new 7th through 12th grade schools from the city’s largest and least successful schools (Kennedy, 2001).

In the Oakland (California) Unified School District, the New Small Autonomous Schools program was formed to create 10 autonomous schools. These schools will enroll 100 to 400 elementary students and 250 to 400 high school students. Similar initiatives to create small schools have existed in Chicago since 1995. Since then, 88 small elementary and 21 small high schools have been created. At the national level, small school initiatives were given recognition by the U.S. Department of Education under the Clinton Administration. The Small Learning Communities program made available \$45 million in grants to help reformers create small learning communities in high schools with enrollments exceeding 1,000 students (Kennedy, 2001).

In districts embracing the concept of small schools, leaders are building smaller facilities; while others are using smaller learning communities in the form of academies, houses, or other school-within-a-school models to bring the small-school environment into larger campuses (Kennedy, 2001). To achieve a smaller setting, educators developed a variety of school types in their efforts toward downsizing. Sammon (quoted in Cotton, 2001) opined that the types of small learning communities created by educators was a true testament to creativity in that, "There is no model for the creation of small learning communities. Their variety is as individual as the schools and the systems in which they are housed" (p. 8). Although there may be variety among the types of schools created, the consensus among school leaders was to try to create a psychological sense of community.

Klonsky, co-director of the Small Schools Workshop at the University of Illinois in Chicago, contended that among the problems schools-within-a-school faced were coordinating room assignments and making sure that students stayed within their houses.

Some schools were able to maintain their unified identity even though the 4,100 students were divided into houses. For example, at the Julia Richman Education Complex in New York, six schools had their own themes, grade spans, and education programs (Kennedy, 2001).

Advocates of small schools warn that the growth of the “small schools movement” could also have a downside if the initiatives of schools were poorly or half-heartedly executed. Dewees (1999) cautioned that, “without full implementation, many of the benefits of small-scale schooling... cannot be realized” (p. 2).

After a nationwide study, University of Tennessee researchers outlined the educational cooperatives that primarily influenced elementary and secondary education (Hughes, Achilles, Leonard, & Spence, 1971). These educational cooperatives were described as a system of education engineered to increase access to maximizing economic conditions, effect better utilization of staff, and improve the cost effectiveness of education. The educational cooperatives also included multi-district units or regional educational service agencies (RESA).

The researchers (Hughes et al., 1971) examined three basic organizational patterns of educational governance that provided greater coordination with other related community organizations. The single-echelon system was described as a state education agency (SEA) that controlled all schools. The two-echelon system was a combination of the SEA and local education agencies (LEA). The three-echelon system included the SEA, some variation of an intermediate unit, and the LEA.

Hughes and others (1971) categorized the cooperative arrangements, limited to cooperative activities with identifiable formal structures (such as a governing board) as

the following: a) intermediate educational service agencies, b) voluntary education cooperatives, c) school study or development councils, and d) school-industry cooperatives.

Intermediate Educational Service Agencies

The Intermediate Educational Service Agency was described as an intermediate unit system including the county office of education, the supervisory union, and a “new” form of intermediate unit. The intermediate units were situated between the structure of the state office of education and the local school district and performed various necessary functions required by the state.

The supervisory union was used in small towns where several schools joined together to employ an administrator to provide supervisory services for all the schools. Rural districts and small communities in Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont were described as having used the supervisory union for professional services that were available to larger urban districts.

The optimum new intermediate unit had an elected governing board of education, a professional administrative officer appointed by the governing board, state and local financing, and a full complement of services for local school districts. The intermediate unit would generally serve at the request of local educational agencies. These intermediate educational service agencies were most often organized to serve a single county or in multi-county area.

Voluntary Education Cooperatives

The voluntary education cooperatives were described as the educational cooperative arrangements, which were not mandated by legislation or regulation. They were generally more flexible in their design and emerged from initiatives at the local school level. The voluntary education cooperatives included a mix of local schools, higher education, regional educational laboratories, and community agencies. The voluntary education cooperative provided the benefits of a complex agency with leadership services from a variety of sources, change development services, curricula improvements, and efficient plan for specialize services that were more economical than buying them on an individual school district basis.

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) and Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) served as two of the many examples of voluntary education cooperatives. The Educational Services Commission in New Jersey and similar organizations in other states exemplify an intermediate unit by providing such services as alternative education and special education services for school districts.

School Study or Development Councils

The school study or school development councils were usually organized in conjunction with a college or university to address the problems identified by the member schools. The distribution of information, publications, and research provided a network for funneling ideas into local schools. These councils operated on the fiscal notion of “pooling and sharing” of resources to help the districts afford jointly what larger or wealthier districts could manage singly. There are at least two such councils in New

Jersey: one associated with Rutgers University and surrounding districts and a new one (2004) organized around Seton Hall University.

School-Industry or Industry-Education Cooperative

The thrust of the school-industry or industry-education cooperatives was to forge partnerships between industries and schools especially in urban areas heavily laden with urban poverty. The cooperatives emerged as, “the problems of urban poverty and heavy environmental pollution seem to be prominent as criteria for identifying such emerging areas” (Hughes et al., 1971, p. 13). The Education Research Council (ERC) of America was recognized as an initial and a major force in the development of the industry-education cooperative. The emerging education-business partnership differed from the industry-education cooperative in that it had business profit as a major goal, yet both cooperatives worked toward improving education. Other education cooperatives included those providing specialized services including computer assistance or television network services to member districts.

The Higher Education Act (PL. 89-329) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act or ESEA (PL. 89-10, 1965) were identified by the researchers (Hughes et al., 1971) as evidence of the federal government’s interest in cooperation. The ESEA, with many modifications, formed the basis and was amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. In 1965, the Higher Education Act through Title I, Community Service and Continuing Education, encouraged the cooperation of institutions of higher learning to join with community agencies to provide resources to communities. The first

federal act with an influential impact on educational cooperation for K-12 education was ESEA, specifically through Titles II and III.

Some ESEA funding required interagency or regional planning as a condition for funding. Title I provides funds for the improvement of education for disadvantaged children through the use of a variety of social agencies and programs. Provisions were also outlined for school districts to apply for grant funds where districts could pool together their funds for consultant aid or a full-time planner to work toward regional planning for Title I.

One portion of funding under ESEA was the Title III Program for projects to Advance Creativity in Education (PACE) designed to advance educational innovation and supplementary educational centers and resource centers. Title IV provided funding for the development of regional educational laboratories and research and development centers. Title V encouraged cooperation between the U.S. Department of Education and the state education agencies. Multi-state cooperation was encouraged identify and solve common problems toward the improvement of education.

Summary of Chapter II

This chapter began with an introduction and the history of small schools. A literature review followed on the benefits of small schools for students that attend them and to the communities in which the small schools exist. Although a growing body of research showed benefits of small-size schools, district and community leaders will need to overcome a national and state mindset of “bigger is better”.

The following section explored how small school leaders organized schools when faced with the pressures of consolidation. In an effort to reap the benefits of small schools, reformers have sought to create small learning communities in large urban schools and districts. The considerable amount of funding made available to large school budget managers to reduce their size and the construction costs of small schools have caused school officials to re-examine the size of their current schools as well as the plans for school construction. The chapter concluded with a summary of the chapter.

Chapter III presents the data needs and sources, the research design, methods, procedures, the participants, and instrumentation used to conduct the study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter the researcher describes the data needs and sources, the research design, methods, procedures, participants, and instrumentation used in this study. Three sections (data collection, data analysis, and summary) explain the research design and methods for the study.

Small schools have played an integral role in providing quality education and a supportive learning environment for students. Since the early 1900's, small schools have been threatened with calls for consolidation or regionalization. With recent legislative decisions relative to administrative costs (e.g., New Jersey Legislative Bill S-1701), administrators in small schools have been confronted with the threat or reality of closing their doors. In this study, the researcher investigated how policy makers and administrators provided curricular options and fiscal viability to small schools embodying elements of economy of scale that can be attained by effective and efficient large schools.

The purposes of the study were to examine the benefits (outputs) of small schools regarding academic achievement, attendance, graduation rates, and dropout rates; to identify how small schools and small districts in New Jersey and elsewhere have used organizational practices and strategies toward cost containment and competitive curricula; and to recommend to superintendents, principals, and boards of education members those effective and efficient practices (inputs) offering fiscal and programmatic viability for small schools.

The following research questions guided the investigation:

1. What are the benefits of small schools for students with respect to academic achievement, attendance, graduation rates, and dropout rates?
2. What benefits do small schools provide to their communities?
3. What challenges do small schools face in maintaining fiscal viability and competitive curricula?
4. What organizational practices and strategies have small school administrators used in an effort to contain costs and to provide competitive curricula?
5. How can school district administrators organize, operate, and communicate to afford the benefits of small schools while utilizing the economy of scale?

Research Design

The descriptive design of this study was to investigate through document analysis, the literature review, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews the benefits, challenges, and organization practices of small schools. Johnson (2001) described the design as descriptive non-experimental research whereby the researcher describes or documents the characteristics of the phenomenon. Through both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study aimed to describe the organization and curricular phenomenon of small schools. More specifically, through the review of the literature and the analysis of research data the study was designed to identify the salient fiscal and curricular practices of education professionals in small schools and small school districts in comparison to educational cooperation practices identified in the research in order to provide further support for the small schools reform.

The researcher examined the practices and strategies of school administrators through a qualitative analysis in the following areas: The benefits and challenges of small schools, the benefits of small schools on the communities in which they existed, and the organizational practices and strategies toward containing cost and providing competitive curricula.

Data

The review of the literature and analysis of documents and material culture (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) presented descriptive and historical findings from studies on small schools. The researcher identified the current research and literature supporting the overwhelming benefits of small schools that may provide insight as to how small schools' organization practices exist as they do today. The researcher presented research on educational cooperatives in which some small schools have participated or were recommended as having cost savings and curricular enhancing potential.

The quantitative data (NJDOE, 2001) documented the statistics relevant to outputs in small schools in this study in categories developed from the research. For this study, the quantitative data categories of student achievement, school enrollment, administrative cost per pupil, attendance, and drop out rates of New Jersey students in small school were compared to the New Jersey corresponding statewide averages. Wiersma (2000) wrote that quantitative analyses enabled the researcher to make valid interpretations through comparisons and partitioning of numeric values. The researcher examined school documents to develop a descriptive profile for outputs of the small schools and small school districts. The documentation was formatted into tables to

display yearly spans for the quantitative data in comparison to the New Jersey state average and District Factor Group data.

The qualitative data were developed through the transcripts of focus-group responses; one-on-one interviews of small school administrators, district-level employees, and school board members; content analyses of archival data, and some of the research/literature review.

Methods

The researcher focused on understanding the complexities and processes of the strategies and tactics used by administrators and budget managers of small schools. The investigator sought theoretical saturation of common themes and trends (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The literature review, document analysis (content analysis), some output data, focus groups interviews, and one-on-one interviews were the primary data sources.

The quantitative data (NJDOE, 2001) were analyzed and synthesized using tables to form a statistical basis for small schools and a meaningful matrix of organization strategies. These strategies were used by administrators in overcoming community-based struggles of cost containment and maintenance of fiscal viability while providing a quality education for all students in small schools.

Qualitative data were synthesized from field notes, recordings, and oral summary transcripts, in addition to debriefings between the researcher and the participants. The debriefings occurred following the interviews or during the conversation as the researcher toured the participants' buildings. The focus-group interviews and in-depth, one-on-one interviews were conducted with participants who were administrators, school leaders, and school board members with experience and expertise with small schools.

The researcher's goal was to understand organization strategies and practices from the perspectives of these participants by entering into their worlds and seeking their perspectives on these phenomena.

Archival data were obtained and analyzed in order to supplement focus group and interviews data. Marshall and Rossman (1999) wrote that the review of such documents "is an unobtrusive method, rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting" (p. 116). Archival data for the participants' districts were gathered to record and examine the community make-up, education policies, and organization practices.

The researcher used content analysis for describing and interpreting the artifacts of the small school districts that were involved in the study. Content analysis was the specialized analytic approach to obtaining a quantitative description of the content of communications and district records as well as the focus group and interview data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study was a series of questions created for both the focus group and one-on-one interviews and was based on the research questions being investigated and the current research. The questions were formulated to address the important benefits of small schools, challenges that small schools face, and the need to explore the organizational practices for cost containment and quality curricula in order for communities to afford small schools.

Four individuals were selected to participate as part of the Jury of Experts. They were asked to provide feedback regarding believability, replicability, and suggestions to

improve the interview questions that would be posed to the focus group and one-on-one interviewees. The first individual was an Administrator who was employed in a K-12 district. As the Vice Principal in the district, the Administrator had also taught in a small school. The Administrator recommended adding the length of time the participant was in the small district as a basis for describing the participants' experience with the small school or small district.

A second individual was a university professor with an extensive background with small schools and small-class size research. Recommendations for amending the interview questions included the use of open-ended questions to elicit multiple responses from the participants, rather than a response of "yes" or "no". Feedback also reflected combining two of the questions into one and aligning the interview questions to the research questions to obtain the information necessary for a thorough investigation.

The third individual was an Assistant Superintendent of a suburban school district in New Jersey. Prior to position in the district, he worked in a small district as a computer teacher and had children who went to a small school. The Assistant Superintendent suggested the questions start out seeking broad themes and move toward more specific questions. Other recommendations were also to include headings that aligned with the research questions in addition to adding probing questions to elicit greater detail from the participants' responses.

The fourth individual on The Jury of Experts was a director of an education department for a private New Jersey university. The Director felt the questions provided an appropriate vehicle for examining the organizational and curricular practices of small school administrators. An additional question was recommended which probed how

important the controlling of non-teaching positions was to efficiency. This question was added as a probe to the interview route along with the recommendations of the other individuals on The Jury of Experts.

The 1 to 1.5 hour focus group and one-on-one interview sessions were comprised of definitive categories of questions. There were introductory, transition, and key questions (Krueger, 1998). The introductory questions, numbers 1a) –1e) (See Table 1) were factual in nature, designed to initiate conversation and provide a level of comfort with the participants. They were followed by a transition question, number 2, which allowed participants to reflect on past practices and experiences. This question was open-ended in nature and focused on the discussion topic and allowed for the participants to expand on their feelings and understandings of the problem that was under investigation. Following the transition question were the key questions that facilitated the connection of the introductory questions with more insightful questions or key questions, numbers 3-10, which drove the study (Krueger, 1998). The closure of the conversation provided time for additional insights. Prior permission was received from the participants and each interview was tape-recorded in its entirety.

In exploring the benefits and challenges of small schools and the organization practices needed to establish and maintain them, the focus group and one-on-one interview questions were categorized. At least the following three areas were addressed: (1) Benefits of small schools, (2) Challenges of small schools, and (3) Organization practices. Validation of these questions taken directly from the literature research was included by categories see Table 2.

Table 1 (continues)
Interview Guide for Participants of Small Schools
Prepared and developed by Christine Burton

Directions: During this interview, I am interested in understanding your experiences as an administrator, district employee, or school board member in a small school. I am particularly interested in your perspectives on the benefits of small schools for students and the community, the challenges of small schools, and the organization of small schools. The feedback you provide will be used to help other administrators and educators understand how to improve and afford small schools.

Introduction:

Let's start with some basic background information:

1. For the purpose of getting to know more about the background of the schools in which each of you work would you do the following:
 - a. State your name and title
 - b. # of years in education
 - c. time in district
 - d. grade level of school(s)/ approximate number of total students
 - e. years you have worked in a small school district
2. The term small school can mean different things to different people. How would you describe the term small school?

Benefits:

3. How do students benefit from small schools?
 - a. Probe: How are attitudes, attendance, dropout rates and graduation rates affected?
 - b. Probe: How are achievements, a sense of belonging, and extracurricular activities affected?
4. How does a community benefit from having a small school within it?
 - a. Probe: How do community members perceive it?
 - b. Probe: How does it provide a hub of the community?

Challenges:

5. What obstacles do administrators face in running a small school?
 - a. Probe: Why have some small schools had to close or been forced to consolidate?

Table 1

6. What are the financial obstacles administrators face in running a small school?
 - a. How important is it to contain the costs of non-instructional personnel?
7. What are the curricular obstacles administrators face in running a small school?

Organization/Promising Practices:

8. What types of organization practices have you used in your small schools?
 - a. Probe: What organizational practices have been the most effective in containing costs?
 - b. Probe:
 - c. Probe: What organizational practices have been the most effective in providing a competitive curriculum?
9. "Economy of scale" is the idea that you can reduce your production cost by increasing the size of the facility. Have you been able to use economy of scale in any way in your school? How so?
10. What organizational practices would you recommend to promote more effective and efficient small schools?

Table 2

Literature and research validation for the categories used in developing the interview questions.

Benefits of Small Schools (Category 1)	Supporting literature and research
Student outcomes/achievement	(Andrews et al., 1995; B. Barker, 1986; Cotton, 1996, 1997, 2001; Fowler, 1989, 1995; Gregory, 1992; Huang & Howley, 1993; Lee & Smith, 1994; Raywid, 1998)
Attendance	(R. G. Barker & Gump, 1964; Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Walberg, 1992)
Extra-curricular participation	(Cotton, 1996, 2001; Hamilton, 1983; Kearney, 1994; Lindsay, 1984)
Dropout	(Funk & Bailey, 1999; Pittman & Haughwout, 1987)
Graduation rates	(Funk & Bailey, 1999; Molnar, 2000; Stiefel et al., 2000)
Self-concept	(Foster & Martinez, 1985; Hamilton, 1983; Rutter, 1988)
Violence	(Bryk et al., 1993; Klonsky, 2002; Meier, 1998)
Community	(Berry, 1993; Fanning, 1995; Lyson, 2002; Nachtigal, 1994; Rutter, 1988; Sergiovanni, 1995)
Challenges of Small Schools (Category 2)	Supporting literature and research
Consolidation	(Fanning, 1995; A. Howley & Howley, 2001; Lepore, 2004; Nelson, 1985; Rincones, 1988; Sell & Leistritz, 1996)
Curricular resources	(Roellke, 1996; Sanders, 1988)
Cost containment	(Cohn, 1975; Lawrence, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1995; Stiefel et al., 2000; Toch, 2003)
Organization Practices (Category 3)	Supporting literature and research
Organizational strategies	(Bryk & Driscoll, 1998; Cotton, 2001; Dewees, 1999; Gewertz, 2001; Hughes et al., 1971; Kennedy, 2001; Monk, 1986; Monk & Haller, 1986; NASSP, 2004; Raywid, 1999; Walberg, 1992; Wasley et al., 2000)
Economy of scale	(Andrews et al., 1995; Association, 1994; Gregory, 2000; C. Howley, 1996; Sergiovanni, 1995; Walberg, 1992)

Participants

In this study, the selection of the small schools was conducted by using the New Jersey Department of Education's list of schools in the state receiving the 2003 New Jersey Small Rural Schools Achievement Program (Americans, 2003) award and the New Jersey Department of Education's list of schools with a student population in the 0-400 range (NJDOE, 2001). The Superintendents or Chief School Administrators of 37 small school districts with enrollments of approximately 400 students were contacted for participation in the study.

The participants were determined based on the respondents, who elected to attend and participate in the research after reviewing and consenting to the research procedure. The 21 participants who chose to participate in this study included twelve Superintendents/Chief School Administrators, one Assistant Superintendent, two Principals, one Assistant Principal, one Director, two Board of Education Presidents, a Business Administrator, and one District Auditor who worked in selected public schools in New Jersey and elsewhere. The participants in the study represented 18 small school districts, as three participants were from duplicate districts as shown in Table 3. Initial contact was made to ascertain if there was enough interest for conducting the study through a letter of introduction outlining the project and the purpose of the study (See Appendix A). The 16 non-participating administrators either did not respond to the invitation to participate or explained that their summer schedules precluded them from participating.

Table 3

Participants' Position in District, Grade Level(s), and the Data Collection Method each participant engaged in for this study.

Participants	Position in District	Grade Level(s) in District	Data Collection Method
Respondent #1	Auditor	9-12	One-on-one interview
Respondent #2	Chief School Administrator	K-8	One-on-one interview
Respondent #3	Chief School Administrator	K-8	One-on-one interview
Respondent #4	Assistant Superintendent	K-8	One-on-one interview
Respondent #5	Principal	K-6	One-on-one interview
Respondent #6	Director	K-8	One-on-one interview
Respondent #7	Superintendent	K-3, 4-8	One-on-one interview
Respondent #8	Superintendent	K-8	One-on-one interview
Respondent #9	Chief School Administrator	K-6	Focus group interview
Respondent #10	Superintendent	K-6	Focus group interview
Respondent #11	Superintendent and Principal	K-6	Focus group interview
Respondent #12	Superintendent and Principal	K-8	Focus group interview
Respondent #13	Business Administrator	K-8	Focus group interview
Respondent #14	Chief School Administrator	K-8	One-on-one interview
Respondent #15	Board of Education President	K-6	One-on-one interview
Respondent #16	Chief School Administrator	K-8	One-on-one interview
Respondent #17	Principal	2-3	One-on-one interview
Respondent #18	Chief School Administrator	K-8	One-on-one interview
Respondent #19	Assistant Principal	9-12	One-on-one interview
Respondent #20	Chief School Administrator	K-8	One-on-one interview
Respondent #21	Board of Education President	7-12	One-on-one interview

The researcher developed a question route (See Table 1) comprised of questions from the research, the literature, theory (see Chapter II), and the research questions being addressed in this study and provided a copy to the participants prior to the interview. The questions were to appear spontaneous to the participants with the goal of procuring a range of ideas and feelings that provide a broader understanding of the problem from a variety of perspectives. The questions were the result of similar questions that had been proposed to a Jury of Experts for review and refinement prior to the data collection.

The researcher and an assistant first conducted two focus group interviews. The design of each interview was the same in order to establish a common ground and structure within the context of each interview session. The interview questions were asked in order of each participant to maintain consistency in the collection of the data. The responsibilities of the assistant were to take notes, to help with unexpected interruptions, to focus on quotes, and to serve as an extra support system to identify information and support the validity of analysis (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Following the focus group interviews, the one-on-one interviews were conducted. The 16 one-on-one interviewees were participants who exhibited key-informant characteristics. The interviewees were individuals who were recommended by the focus group participants as having expertise to pursue specific topics in greater depth with small schools. These interviewees were particularly well informed, articulate, and approachable in their knowledge of small schools. The interviewees also included administrators who were unable to be part of the focus group interviews, but were eager to participate in a one-on-one interview.

Collection of Data

Many sources of data reflected on the research problem under study. The descriptive data sources were provided through the review of school board minutes, government archives, bibliographical guides, newspapers, magazines, and journals for information and cross-reference materials found in other sources. University libraries and public records were the main sources used to conduct the review of the literature. The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and EBSCO *host* (Elton B. Stephens Company) On-line websites were utilized to conduct searches for empirical sources and district report cards for demographics, attendance, and school budget information.

The two focus-group interviews and 16 one-on-one interviews were conducted to obtain an overview of the benefits of small schools to students and communities, the challenges small schools face, as well as to identify organizational practices utilized to contain costs and to offer competitive curricula. The interview questions for both the focus group and on-on-one interviews addressed the following issues: benefits of small schools to students, benefits to the community, challenges to small schools, organizational practices to contain costs, organizational practices to provide competitive curricula, and organizational practices to afford small schools through economy of scale.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected output data. In the analysis, the researcher sought general statements about relationships among categories of data in order to build grounded theory

(Strauss & Corbin, 1997). The initial data analysis was conducted using the information based on the small schools' student performance, financial, and classroom data organized in the data tables (See Tables 6-12, pp. 72-86). This process followed an overall content analysis approach to data analysis which consisted of data reduction, display, and interpretation (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Wolcott, 2001). Additionally, each focus group and one-on-one interview was transcribed and the text was input into the qualitative data management software, N6 (Richards, 2002). The formal analysis was conducted through a six-phase process asserted by Marshall and Rossman (1999).

Phase 1: Organizing the data

The organization of the data began through the transcription of the audiotapes. Authors have recommended getting a general overall sense of the data set by reading carefully, multiple times, all collected data (Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Tesch, 1990). In addition to reading the transcripts, notes taken during the sessions by the researcher and the assistant were reviewed as reflections on the focus group and one-on-one interviews.

Following each one-on-one interview, a contact summary form (see Appendix B) was completed. The completion of a contact summary form shortly after each interview provided a structured way to reflect upon the contact and to identify main issues or themes. Notes taken by the researcher and assistant during the focus groups and the contact summary forms were a source of analytic insights and clues to focus data collection more tightly (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). While getting acquainted with the data, possible codes reflective of the categories, or "labels for assigning units of

meaning”, for the next phase of the analysis were developed (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56).

Phase 2: Generating categories, themes, and patterns

The process of category generation developed patterns expressed by the literature review, the conceptual framework, and the participants’ responses. As categories of meaning emerged from the review of the transcripts, the researcher identified those that have internal convergence and external divergence (Guba, 1978, as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Said differently, the categories were internally consistent while distinct from one another. The researcher strove to identify the salient, grounded categories of meaning held by participants.

Patton (1990) depicted the processes of inductive analysis where pertinent categories emerge from the data. The researcher used “indigenous typologies” (p. 306) or analyst-constructed typologies” (pp. 393-400) to denote the understandings provided by the participants. Indigenous typologies are those generated and expressed by participants and are created through analyses of the local use of language (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). These terms were typical of the small schools, their culture, and organization as determined by the literature review and conceptual framework.

Analyst-constructed typologies are those created by the researcher that were reflective of the data, but not necessarily used expressly by participants (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The process involved uncovering patterns, themes, and categories for the purpose of creating meaning for the data. The categories were developed for the purpose of analyzing the commonalities and generalizations among the practices of the participants in comparison to those reflected in the research. The elements in the

literature review and conceptual framework (see Figure 1, p. 6) guided the categories as well as the relevant issues developed in the research questions.

Phase 3: Coding the data

Consistent with the recommendations of Miles and Huberman (1994), coding for initial categories was developed from the conceptual framework and the research questions from which both the focus group and one-on-one interview protocol was established in addition to cross-validating the data. Coding included participants' background, define small schools, benefits of small schools, community benefits, challenges of small schools, financial challenges, curricular challenges, organization practices to contain costs, organization practices for current curriculum, limiting non-teaching positions, economy of scale, and other codes developed through discussions including effective and efficient small school practices, and any additional ideas that participants shared. The focus group and interview data were entered into the N6 software program and coded by sentence. Careful annotation of coded sentences, where appropriate, was completed in order to avoid loss of context if sentences were extracted from the overall text. As the researcher coded the data, new understandings and insights emerged necessitating changes and new codes to the original process. Additionally, through reading the transcripts, the researcher identified responses that reflected the themes in the coding, but may not have used the exact coded term or phrases.

Phase 4: Testing the emergent understandings

This phase was characterized by the evaluation of the usefulness and centrality of the data. The usefulness of the data was determined by the data's ability to illuminate the

questions being explored and “how they are central to the story that is unfolding about the social phenomena” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 157).

The primary means of understanding the data were through the interpretations of the cross-classifications that were formatted into a table. The researcher conducted an analysis to search for patterns and themes across and within categories used in developing the interview questions described in Table 4. These common themes are presented as part of the findings in Chapter IV.

Table 4
Coding and Themes Across the Categories of the Interview Questions.

Category	Coding and Themes
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background
Benefits of small schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define small schools • Benefits of small schools • Community benefits
Challenges of small schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General challenges • Financial • Current curriculum
Organization practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To contain costs • To maintain current curriculum • Limiting non-teaching positions • Economy of scale
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective and efficient small school practices • Additional recommendations

Phase 5: Searching for alternative explanations

Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggested that the researcher critically challenge the patterns that seemed obvious and search for explanations between them. Since alternative explanations always existed, the researcher sought to find and identify the most plausible linkage between the various data sets that were obtained.

Phase 6: Use of interpretation to address research questions

The final phase of analysis concluded with the written summations and reflections of the complexity of the data. Data included in the tables were helpful in describing the output of small schools. The categorical aggregation approach purported by Stake (cited in Creswell, 1998) was the most likely way to analyze the focus group and interview data within and across categories. The researcher searched from a collection of instances across administrators and budget managers in order for “issue-relevant meaning” to emerge (cited in Creswell, 1998, p. 153).

In Table 5, the researcher identified the research questions as they coincided with subsidiary questions. Questions 1-3 on the question route were asked to elicit the benefits of small school with respect to academic achievement, attendance, graduation rates, and dropout rates.

Table 5

Research Questions as they coincide with the interview questions (pp. 56-57).

Research Questions	Interview Protocol for Participants
Question #1 What are the benefits of small schools for students with respect to academic achievement, attendance, graduation rates, and dropout rates?	1, 2, 3
Question #2 What benefits do small schools provide to their communities?	4, 5
Question #3 What challenges do small schools face in maintaining fiscal viability and competitive curricula?	5, 6, 7
Question #4 What organizational practices and strategies have small school administrators used in an effort to contain costs and to provide competitive curricula?	8, 10
Question #5 How can school district administrators organize, operate, and communicate to afford the benefits of small schools while utilizing the economy of scale?	9

Questions 4 and 5 focused on the benefits that small schools provided to their communities. Providing a hub of the community as well as a community meeting place were key discussion areas.

Interview questions 5-7 addressed the challenges administrators faced in running a small school. Specifically the areas of maintaining fiscal viability and competitive curricula were the focus. Organization strategies to manage these challenges were probed with questions 8 and 10. Question 9 referenced the organization practices utilizing economy of scale.

Upon receiving approval of the Institutional Review Board from Seton Hall University, the researcher began gathering achievement and financial data on the small elementary, middle, and high schools in New Jersey. The researcher conducted focus group and one-on-one interviews with administrators, district employees, and school board presidents of small schools between July and October of 2004.

Summary of Chapter III

In this chapter are presented an introduction, the research design, methodology, and procedures of the study. It included a description of the data needs, focus groups and one-on-one interviews as the instrumentation, participants, and data analysis through the massaging of quantitative data and the use of qualitative research data management software. A detailed description of the content analysis was presented as a process to create rich, thick descriptions of organization strategies used by administrators in overcoming challenges, while providing the benefits of small schools and a quality education for all students in small schools.

The results of the research will be presented in Chapter IV along with the presentation of the overall responses. For each category addressed, the researcher provided the data obtained through these various methods and collection of data in addition to an evidence trail that was verified through participant responses. The threads and common patterns that were found throughout small schools study are presented and interpreted in order to draw comprehensive conclusions on the most promising organization practices.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND FINDINGS

Introduction

The purposes of the study were to examine the benefits (outputs) of small schools regarding academic achievement, attendance, graduation rates, and dropout rates; to identify how small schools and small districts in New Jersey and elsewhere have used organizational practices and strategies toward cost containment and competitive curricula; and to recommend to superintendents, principals, and boards of education members those effective and efficient practices (inputs) offering fiscal and programmatic viability for small schools.

The focus of Chapter IV is to present the analysis of data and the findings for this study. These findings include the descriptive analysis of the information and empirical data for the demographics, attendance, student performance, and school budget information for the New Jersey small districts studied. Also presented are the organization strategies that were evident in the focus group and one-on-one interview transcriptions in overcoming challenges, while providing the benefits and a quality education for all students in small schools.

This chapter consists of an introduction, an organization of the analysis, including the analysis of the descriptive data on the New Jersey small schools studied, quantitative data describing such measures as the administrative cost per student, attendance, and student achievement scores as compared with the New Jersey State average and District Factor Group schools; and a qualitative data analysis of the overall responses from focus group and one-on-one interviews. This chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter.

Organization of the Analysis

Research Questions

In this study, the researcher attempted to answer the following questions:

- What are the benefits of small schools for students with respect to academic achievement, attendance, graduation rates, and dropout rates?
- What benefits do small schools provide to their communities?
- What challenges do small schools face in maintaining fiscal viability and competitive curricula?
- What organizational practices and strategies have small school administrators used in an effort to contain costs and to provide competitive curricula?
- How can school district administrators organize, operate, and communicate to afford the benefits of small schools while utilizing the economy of scale?

Analysis of Data (Descriptive, Qualitative, and Quantitative/Comparisons)

Table 6 provides a general description of the 18 small schools labeled in their respective districts as District A through District R. From 2000-2003, there was broad stability in enrollment during the three years studied. The average class size was well within the acceptable limits based on the research (Finn et al., 2003). Attendance rates reflected levels that were found to be more favorable in smaller schools as compared with their other school counterparts (Fowler, 1995). Table 6 also compares the small districts' administrative costs/pupil to the New Jersey State average.

Table 6

2000-2003 Student enrollment, class size averages, attendance rates, & administrative costs/pupil for selected small schools

2000-2003 STUDENT ENROLLMENT, CLASS SIZE AVERAGES, ATTENDANCE RATES, & ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS/PUPIL FOR SELECTED SMALL SCHOOLS													
School District	Grade Levels	Student Enrollment		Avg. Class Size	Attendance Rates		Administrative Costs /Pupil			Administrative Costs/Pupil State Avg.			
		00-'01	01-'02	02-'03		01-'02	02-'03	00-'01	01-'02	02-'03	00-'01	01-'02	02-'03
District A	K-8	267	298	321	17.8	95.7	95	\$1,086	\$1,105	\$1,036	\$1,006	\$1,074	\$1,095
District B	K-8	547	572	571	19.7	95.6	96.1	\$1,207	\$1,274	\$1,332	\$1,006	\$1,074	\$1,095
District C	K-8	130	141	139	15.4	95.1	95.5	\$1,365	\$1,341	\$2,841	\$1,006	\$1,074	\$1,095
District D	K-6	93	90	79	11.3	95.5	96.2	\$2,070	\$2,453	\$2,372	\$1,006	\$1,074	\$1,095
District E	K-3	289	290	282	16.6	96	95.7	\$1,102	\$1,060	\$927	\$1,006	\$1,074	\$1,095
District F	4-8	440	427	424	17.7	95.8	96	\$1,102	\$1,060	\$927	\$1,006	\$1,074	\$1,095
District G	K-8	475	461	480	18.5	95.9	96.3	\$1,326	\$1,330	\$1,377	\$1,006	\$1,074	\$1,095
District H	K-6	64	60	64	9.1	95.4	92.6	\$1,742	\$2,075	\$2,333	\$1,006	\$1,074	\$1,095
District I	K-6	189	180	181	13.9	95.5	94.9	\$1,375	\$1,604	\$1,726	\$1,006	\$1,074	\$1,095
District J	K-6	190	174	198	13.2	95.7	95.9	\$1,285	\$1,595	\$1,570	\$1,006	\$1,074	\$1,095
District K	K-8	195	195	186	16.9	95.4	95.6	\$2,270	\$2,279	\$2,658	\$1,006	\$1,074	\$1,095
District L	K-8	137	139	127	14.1	95.0	94.1	\$1,468	\$1,514	\$1,742	\$1,006	\$1,074	\$1,095
District M	K-8	138	126	129	12.9	95	95.3	\$1,942	\$2,050	\$2,386	\$1,006	\$1,074	\$1,095
District N	K-3	249	263	253	19.5	96.2	96	\$977	\$1,027	\$996	\$1,006	\$1,108	\$1,095
District O	K-8	305	273	268	14.9	95.5	95.5	\$1,113	\$1,080	\$1,133	\$1,006	\$1,074	\$1,095
District P	K-8	292	309	319	17.7	95.6	95	\$1,136	\$1,114	\$1,266	\$1,006	\$1,074	\$1,095
District Q	7-12	365	363	339	17	94.4	94.3	\$1,785	\$2,433	\$2,216	\$1,202	\$1,193	\$1,205
District R	9-12	532.5	522	563.5	24.5	93.7	95.8	\$1,110	\$1,093	\$1,041	\$1,043	\$1,108	\$1,096
NJ State Average					19.3	94.4	94.3	\$1,006	\$1,074	\$1,095			

The following research question guided the review of the selected descriptive data related to the small schools in this study:

What are the benefits of small schools for students with respect to attendance, graduation rates, and dropout rates? (e.g. Fowler, 1995; Funk & Bailey, 1999; Lee & Smith, 1994; Molnar et al., 2000; Stiefel et al., 2000).

The participants for this study were from small schools throughout the state of New Jersey. The descriptive data highlighted the statistics relative to each of the small schools.

School Enrollment

School enrollment was consistent across the three-year span of 2000-2003 ranging from 60 students to 572 students. Of the 16 school districts within the K-8 configuration that were represented in this study, 13 had enrollments of 400 or fewer students (See Table 6). According to the research, no specific number of students defined a small school (Cotton, 1996), however Boyer (1995) established the number of students in a small school at approximately 400 students in the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's *The Basic School: A Community for Learning*. In 2002-2003, Districts B, F, and G had approximately 180, 25, and 80 students respectively above the 400 mark considered to be a small school. However, the administrators and communities in all three elementary schools considered their schools to be small. The two high schools were well within the 800 student enrollment for small high schools according to Williams (1990).

From the years 2000 to 2003, these small school enrollments were as small as 60 students in District H and as large as 572 students in District B. District A had the largest increase of 54 students in the three-year span. One contributing factor to the increase was that District A included students from neighboring districts as part of its Interdistrict Choice School Program. District O experienced the largest decrease of 37 students during this same time period. The School Board President in District Q commented that the student enrollment in the range of 340 to 360 students was as stable as the enrollment when the school opened in 1961.

Class Size

The class size averages in all 16 of the K-8 districts were below the recommended class size of fewer than 20 pupils (Finn et al., 2003) and ranged from 9 to 19.7. The average class size was smaller than the New Jersey State average class size in 16 of the 18 small schools. In Districts B and R, class size averages were larger by 0.4 and 5.2 students respectively as compared to the New Jersey reported average class size of 19.3 students. Table 6 denoted that class size averages increased as the size of the school enrollment increased. Administrators noted that having a small school does not necessarily translate into smaller class sizes; however, the average class size of District M at 12.9 with an enrollment of 129 students in 2002-2003 was lower than the average class size of District F at 17.7 students and a total student enrollment of 424 students.

Attendance

The small school attendance rates ranging from 92.6% to 96.3% were consistently higher during the two-year span 2001-2003 than the NJ State average of 94.4% and 94.3% respectively. The attendance rates of all districts with some configuration from grades K-8 were greater than the NJ State average of 94.4% for 2001-2002 with only the two high school districts lower than the NJ State average (see Table 6). In 2002-2003, the attendance rates in Districts H and L were lower than the NJ State average of 94.3% and the attendance rate of District Q was the same as the NJ State average. Overall, these higher attendance rates are congruent with Fowler (1995) who found attendance rates to be higher in small schools as compared with large schools. The range of attendance rates from 92.6% in District H to 96.3% in District G in 2002-2003 represent a generally high level of attendance for the small schools studied. Of note was that the highest average rate of 7.4% of the students who were absent in District H represented approximately 5 students when compared to the total enrollment of 64 students.

Administrators commented that they were able to keep a very close handle on attendance issues. When students were absent, families were called and homework was sent home.

Administrative Cost Per Pupil

The small school administrative costs per pupil were generally higher than the NJ State average with a range of \$927 to \$2,841. The administrative costs per pupil in 2000-2001 (See Table 6) for 17 of the 18 small schools were higher than the NJ State average of \$1,006. In comparison to the NJ State average, the differences ranged from \$80 to

\$1,835 more than the NJ State average. Four districts were within \$100 of the NJ State average, three within \$250, five within \$250, two within \$750, one within \$1,000, and two were \$1,000 greater than the average. District D was one of the districts with administrative costs per pupil more than \$1,000 above the NJ State average. The Administrative costs/pupil (calculated by all administrative costs divided by the student enrollment) of District D in 2000–2001 were \$2,070 and increased in 2002–2003 to \$2,372 due in part to the decrease in student enrollment from 93 students in 2000–2001 to 79 students in 2002–2003. In addition, District D was in a sending/receiving relationship with a neighboring district, which required District D to calculate the tuition for its seventh and eighth grade students into the administrative costs per pupil. Unlike District D, District H sent its seventh and eighth grade students to a regional high school, which allowed District H to calculate the costs for its students in grades K–6 only.

In 2001–2002, three small schools had administrative costs lower than the NJ State average of \$1,074. Five of the 18 districts had administrative costs per pupil lower than their previous year, even with a decrease in enrollment during that same year.

In 2002–2003, five of the 18 districts had administrative costs per pupil below the administrative cost per pupil for the NJ State average of \$1,095. Districts continued to find ways to decrease their administrative costs per pupil as evidenced by 8 of the 18 decreasing these costs over the previous year 2001–2002. District Q managed to decrease costs by as much as \$217 or approximately 9% below their previous year's administrative cost per pupil. Containing administrative costs continues to be a struggle for most of the small schools studied.

State Aid

The data on State Aid Funding in Table 7 reflect similar local, state, federal, and other percentages across the three-year span for each of the small schools. For example, in District E, the state aid percentages from 2000 to 2003 were 11%, 12%, and 11% respectively. In comparison to the NJ State Aid Average, 12 of the 18 small schools in 2000-2001 required local taxpayers to pay more than 67% of the taxes for their local school. Similarly during the years 2001-2003, 13 of the 18 small schools had taxpayers pay 66% and 69% respectively for the local school tax bill. In the category of Other, Administrators referred to a variety of state grants they received to supplement the taxes collected from local taxpayers.

Examining percentages of yearly state aid revealed state funds for schools with lower SES or District Factor Groupings (DFG) toward the beginning of the alphabet (e.g. B, CD, and DE) were generally higher. For example, in districts in a DFG of I or J, the districts' local taxpayers were responsible for 79% to 92% of the tax bill, while districts in a DFG of B, CD or DE the local taxpayers paid 33% to 57% of the district's tax bill with the exception of District P who was in DFG DE with a local tax percentage of 84%.

Academic Achievement

The overall academic achievement of students in small schools was higher than the achievement scores of the NJ State average for similar DFG schools. The percentages of students in 16 of 18 small schools (excluding Districts G and O) performing at the proficient or advanced proficient levels was 80% or higher on the fourth grade 2001-2002 Elementary School Proficiency Assessment (ESPA) in Language Arts as compared with the NJ State average of 79.1% (See Table 8).

Table 7

2000-2003 New Jersey State Aid for Selected Small Schools

2000-2003 NEW JERSEY STATE AID FOR SELECTED SMALL SCHOOLS

School District	Grade Levels	District Factor Group	State Aid (%)											
			00-'01				01-'02				02-'03			
			Local	State	Federal	Other	Local	State	Federal	Other	Local	State	Federal	Other
District A	K-8	CD	35	65	3	-3	32	60	3	5	30	63	3	4
District B	K-8	J	91	7	1	1	88	6	1	5	93	6	1	0
District C	K-8	GH	65	37	1	-3	62	31	1	6	60	37	1	2
District D	K-6	I	92	7	1	0	91	7	1	1	91	7	1	1
District E	K-3	FG	86	11	2	1	83	12	2	3	83	11	2	4
District F	4-8	FG	86	11	2	1	83	12	2	3	83	11	2	4
District G	K-8	I	79	15	1	5	78	14	2	6	81	14	1	4
District H	K-6	FG	79	2	1	18	91	2	2	5	94	2	1	3
District I	K-6	GH	86	11	2	1	84	7	3	6	87	9	2	2
District J	K-6	GH	84	12	2	2	87	9	1	3	87	10	1	2
District K	K-8	FG	62	31	2	5	67	28	2	3	66	29	2	4
District L	K-8	FG	82	16	2	0	77	19	2	2	79	17	2	2
District M	K-8	FG	57	38	3	2	59	22	2	17	61	28	1	10
District N	K-3	J	92	8	1	-1	87	7	1	5	90	7	1	2
District O	K-8	B	57	40	2	1	57	36	3	4	57	37	2	4
District P	K-8	DE	84	11	1	4	83	9	1	7	85	9	1	5
District Q	7-12	GH	87	11	2	0	85	10	2	3	89	9	1	1
District R	9-12	DE	33	28	2	37	31	34	2	33	31	32	2	35
NI State Average			67	27	2	4	66	26	2	6	69	26	2	3

Table 8

2001-2002 ESPA RESULTS FOR SELECTED SMALL SCHOOLS

School District	Grade Levels	No. Tested	ESPA LA						ESPA MATH					
			2001-2002						2001-2002					
			School			DFG			School			DFG		
			PP	P	AP	PP	P	AP	PP	P	AP	PP	P	AP
District A	K-8	28	7.1	85.7	7.1	24.9	72	32	21.4	60.7	17.9	37	42.7	20.3
District B	K-8	65	4.6	83.1	12.3	7.2	79.5	13.4	6.2	23.1	70.8	13.1	40.9	46
District C	K-8	14	14.3	85.7	0	18.7	76.8	4.5	20	40	40	29.2	45.5	25.3
District D	K-6	14	14.3	85.7	0	12.7	79.1	8.2	7.1	64.3	28.6	19.6	44.1	36.2
District E	K-3	*												
District F	4-8	79	19	75.9	5.1	14.9	78.8	6.3	24.1	38	38	22.7	45.3	32
District G	K-8	59	22.5	62.5	15	7.2	79.5	13.4	19.5	43.9	36.6	13.1	40.9	46
District H	K-6	11	0	90.9	9.1	14.9	78.8	6.3	9.1	36.4	54.5	22.7	45.3	32
District I	K-6	31	12.9	87.1	0	14.9	78.8	6.3	29	54.8	16.1	22.7	45.3	32
District J	K-6	24	16.7	79.2	4.2	14.9	78.8	6.3	12.5	41.7	45.8	22.7	45.3	32
District K	K-8	23	8.7	87	4.3	14.9	78.8	6.3	13	52.2	34.8	22.7	45.3	32
District L	K-8	21	9.5	85.7	4.8	18.7	76.8	4.5	28.6	57.1	14.3	29.2	45.5	25.3
District M	K-8	11	0	81.8	18.2	18.7	76.8	4.5	9.1	54.5	36.4	29.2	45.5	25.3
District N	K-3	*												
District O	K-8	27	22.2	77.8	0	24.9	72	32	22.2	25.9	51.9	37	42.7	20.3
District P	K-8	34	14.7	79.4	5.9	18.7	76.8	4.5	23.5	64.7	11.8	29.2	45.5	25.3
District Q	7-12	*												
District R	9-12	*												
NJ State Average			20.9	73.1	6				31.5	41.3	27.2			

* No grade 4 was included in these small schools or districts.

The percentage of students at the partial proficient level in small schools as compared to their DFG counterparts tended to be lower in 2001-2002. In 12 of the 14 (86%) small schools with fourth-grade students, the percentage of students in the proficient level in Language Arts was higher than the percentages schools in their DFGs on the ESPA in 2001-2002. The DFG schools did outscore the small schools in Advanced Proficient in 8 of the 14 (58%) schools possibly due to the larger number of students tested who scored at the Advanced Proficient level as compared to the number tested in the small schools.

The math performance of fourth graders in small school during 2001-2002 on the Grade 4 ESPA resulted in all small schools below the NJ State average of 31.5% for Partially Proficient students. Ten of the small schools had Advanced Proficient levels above the NJ State average of 27.2% with as many as 70.8% at the Advanced Proficient level in mathematics in District B. As compared with their DFG schools, 11 of the 14 (79%) small schools outperformed their counterparts in mathematics on the Grade 4 ESPA using the combined Proficient and Advanced Proficient measures.

Starting in 2002-2003, New Jersey revised the ESPA and began administering the NJ Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK4) to all fourth-grade students. Performance of students at the Partial Proficient level was above the NJ State average in two small schools in Language Arts (See Table 9).

In mathematics, the small schools in Districts K and P were the only schools below the NJ State average of 32% of students at the Partial Proficient level on the NJ ASK4 in 2002-2003. The small schools also had larger percentages of Advanced Proficient students than did NJ and the DFG counterparts. Two of the small schools had fourth-grade classes with fewer than the ten student minimum which the Department of Education required in order for there to be sufficient information to eliminate the possibility that personally identifiable scores could be disclosed (NJDOE, 2001).

Eighth-grade students in all but District O outperformed their peers in Language Arts on the 2001-2002 GEPA as compared with the NJ State average (See Table 10).

Table 9

**2002-2003 NEW JERSEY ASK4 RESULTS FOR
SELECTED SMALL SCHOOLS**

School District	Grade Levels	No. Tested	NJ ASK 4 LA						NJ ASK 4 MATH					
			2002-2003						2002-2003					
			School			DFG			School			DFG		
			PP	P	AP	PP	P	AP	PP	P	AP	PP	P	AP
District A	K-8	27	22.2	77.8	0	25.8	72.6	1.6	22.2	59.3	18.5	35.5	45.1	19.5
District B	K-8	71	8.5	85.9	5.6	7.9	83.6	8.5	16.9	33.8	49.3	14.9	45.2	39.9
District C	K-8	13	7.7	84.6	7.7	17.3	79.1	3.1	7.7	46.2	46.2	28.7	45.9	25.4
District D	K-6	16	12.5	75	12.5	12.8	81.8	5.4	25	18.8	56.3	22.2	45.5	32.4
District E	K-3	**												
District F	4-8	73	15.1	83.6	1.4	15.6	80.2	4.2	28.8	41.1	30.1	25.6	47.1	27.3
District G	K-8	59	8.5	91.5	0	7.9	83.6	8.5	22	44.1	33.9	14.9	45.2	39.9
District H	K-6	9	*	*	*				*	*	*			
District I	K-6	27	33.3	63	3.7	15.6	80.2	4.2	26.9	46.2	26.9	25.6	47.1	27.3
District J	K-6	33	6.1	84.8	9.1	15.6	80.2	4.2	12.1	54.5	33.3	25.6	47.1	27.3
District K	K-8	27	25.9	66.7	7.4	15.6	80.2	4.2	33.3	37	29.6	25.6	47.1	27.3
District L	K-8	16	18.8	75	6.3	17.8	79.1	3.1	25	50	25	28.7	45.9	25.4
District M	K-8	8	*	*	*				*	*	*			
District N	K-3	**												
District O	K-8	36	13.9	86.1	0	25.8	72.6	1.6	25	38.9	36.1	35.5	45.1	19.5
District P	K-8	36	22.2	77.8	0	17.8	79.1	3.1	33.3	58.3	8.3	28.7	45.9	25.4
District Q	7-12	**												
District R	9-12	**												
NJ State Average														
			22.3	73.8	3.8				32	42.8	25.2			

* To protect the privacy of students, the Department of Education suppresses sufficient information to eliminate the possibility that personally identifiable information will be disclosed (NJDOE,2001).

** No grade 4 was included in these schools or districts.

Table 10

**2001-2002 GRADE 8 GEPA RESULTS
FOR SELECTED NJ SMALL SCHOOLS**

School District	Grade Levels	No. Tested	GEPA LA						GEPA Math					
			2001-2002						2001-2002					
			School			DFG			School			DFG		
			PP	P	AP	PP	P	AP	PP	P	AP	PP	P	AP
District A	K-8	31	22.6	77.4	0	31	64.2	4.8	41.9	48.4	9.7	50.9	39.9	9.2
District B	K-8	69	4.3	63.8	31.9	9.7	72.8	17.4	0	30.9	69.1	19.8	50	30.2
District C	K-8	8	*	*	*				*	*	*			
District D	K-6	**												
District E	K-3	**												
District F	4-8	71	18.3	77.5	4.2	18.8	72.8	8.3	43.7	40.8	15.5	33.6	48.4	17.9
District G	K-8	50	10	78	12	9.7	72.8	17.4	18	58	24	19.8	50	30.2
District H	K-6	**												
District I	K-6	**												
District J	K-6	**												
District K	K-8	29	24.1	69	6.9	18.8	72.8	8.3	10.3	62.1	27.6	33.6	48.4	17.9
District L	K-8	13	23.1	69.2	7.7	22.5	70.7	6.7	30.8	53.8	15.4	41.2	45.9	12.9
District M	K-8	10	*	*	*				*	*	*			
District N	K-3	**												
District O	K-8	30	30	63.3	6.7	31	64.2	4.8	53.3	40	6.7	50.9	39.9	9.2
District P	K-8	40	12.5	65	22.5	22.5	70.7	6.7	35	60	5	41.2	45.9	12.9
District Q	7-12	57	14	71.9	14	18.8	72.8	8.3	24.6	61.4	14	33.6	48.4	17.9
District R	9-12	**												
NJ State Average			26.8	64.9	8.3				41.8	42.2	16			

* To protect the privacy of students, the Department of Education suppresses sufficient information to eliminate the possibility that personally identifiable information will be disclosed.

** No grade 8 was included in these small schools or districts.

When compared with their DFG schools, six of the nine small schools outperformed their counterparts in mathematics on the GEPA using the combined Proficient and Advanced Proficient measures. Of note was that two of the small schools had eighth grade classes with fewer than 10 students. The Department of Education requires there to be sufficient number of scores (10 or more) to eliminate the possibility that personally identifiable scores could be disclosed (NJDOE, 2001).

In 2002-2003, there were approximately 460 eighth-grade students tested on the Grade 8 GEPA in the small schools in this study. The performance for 81 of 460 (17.6%) students in small schools was below the NJ State Average of 26.2% in Language Arts resulting in approximately 82.4% of students at the combined Proficient and Advanced Proficient levels (See Table 11). As compared with their DFG, the small school students outperformed their peers in 6 of the 11 schools with eighth-grade students.

In 7 of the 11 small schools with eighth-grade students, the percentage of eighth graders at the Partial Proficient level was lower than the NJ State Average of 43.2% in mathematics on the 2002-2003 GEPA. The percentages of those students at the Partial Proficient level ranged from 58.8% in District C, which equated to 10 students, to 4.6% in District B, which equated to three students. Of the 460 students tested, 153 or 33.2% of the students in the small schools studied were at the Partial Proficient level in mathematics, which was still lower than the NJ State Average of 43.2%. As compared with students in their DFG counterpart schools, the performance of students in small schools was higher in 5 of the 11 small schools as compared with the DFG schools. The outstanding performance of District B students out-performed the NJ State Average and the DFG schools in both subject areas. Partial Proficient levels of students in Language Arts were as low as 3.1% and Advanced Proficient levels were as high as 64.6% in mathematics.

The overall performance of high school students on the 2001-2003 Grade 11 HSPA in Districts Q and R reflected mathematics scores higher than the NJ State Averages and slightly below their DFG counterparts (See Table 12). As compared to their DFG peers, the students' HSPA scores in District R were 0.2% above the scores of students in the DFG schools while the DFG schools' scores edged those in District Q by 6.9% using the combined Proficient and Advanced Proficient measures.

The student scores in Language Arts for District R on the Grade 11 HSPA for 2001-2002 were 6.9% below the NJ State Average, while the student scores in District Q were 0.4% above the NJ State Average of 18.9% for Partial Proficient measures. These student performance percentages from the small high school in this study would equate to 28 of the 207 total eleventh graders tested who did not pass the HSPA, which is a high school graduation requirement for all students in NJ. As for mathematics, the students in District R outscored the students in the DFG schools by 3.7%, which the students in the DFG schools were 6% higher than the students in District Q. The students in the small high school outperformed the NJ State average student scores during both years in mathematics and language arts.

Table 11

**2002 – 2003 GRADE 8 GEPA RESULTS
FOR SELECTED NJ SMALL SCHOOLS**

School District	Grade Levels	No. Tested	GEPA LA						GEPA Math					
			2002-2003						2002-2003					
			School			DFG			School			DFG		
			PP	P	AP	PP	P	AP	PP	P	AP	PP	P	AP
District A	K-8	37	35.1	64.9	0	29.5	67	3.4	56.8	40.5	2.7	52.8	37.9	9.4
District B	K-8	65	3.1	69.2	27.7	9.2	76.6	14.1	4.6	30.8	64.6	21.6	48.2	30.2
District C	K-8	17	35.3	64.7	0	21.8	73.4	4.8	58.8	41.2	0	41.2	45.3	13.5
District D	K-6	**												
District E	K-3	**												
District F	4-8	88	22.7	72.7	4.5	19.1	73.9	7	33	48.9	18.2	35.6	47.3	17.1
District G	K-8	62	16.1	83.9	0	9.2	76.6	14.1	27.4	54.8	17.7	21.6	48.2	30.2
District H	K-6	**												
District I	K-6	**												
District J	K-6	**												
District K	K-8	21	19	76.2	4.8	19.1	73.9	7	28.6	57.1	14.3	35.6	47.3	17.1
District L	K-8	14	21.4	78.6	0	21.8	73.4	4.8	42.9	50	7.1	41.2	45.3	13.5
District M	K-8	18	22.2	66.7	11.1	21.8	73.4	4.8	44.4	44.4	11.1	41.2	45.3	13.5
District N	K-3	**												
District O	K-8	24	12.5	70.8	16.7	29.5	67	3.4	41.7	45.8	12.5	52.8	37.9	9.4
District P	K-8	44	11.4	81.8	6.8	21.8	73.4	4.8	48.8	44.2	7	41.2	45.3	13.5
District Q	7-12	70	15.7	80	4.3	19.1	73.9	7	31.4	47.1	21.4	35.6	47.3	17.1
District R	9-12	**												
NJ State Average			26.2	67.2	6.6				43.2	40.8	15.9			

* To protect the privacy of students, the Department of Education suppresses sufficient information to eliminate the possibility that personally identifiable information will be disclosed.

** No grade 8 included in these small schools or districts.

The student scores in Language Arts for District R on the Grade 11 HSPA for 2001-2002 were 6.9% below the NJ State Average while the student scores in District Q's scores were 0.4% above the NJ State Average of 18.9% for Partial Proficient measures. As for mathematics, District R outscored its DFG Schools by 3.7%, while the DFG scores were 6% higher than the students in District Q.

In 2002-2003, students' performances on the HSPA in both District Q and District R were superior to the NJ State Averages in language arts and mathematics (See Table 12). Improvements for District Q equated to a 7.7% decrease in Partial Proficient levels and a 4% increase in Advanced Proficient levels in language arts as compared with the 2001-2002 scores. In District R, Partial Proficient levels increased by 5.7%, however Advanced Proficient levels went from 9.3% to 17.7% for language arts when comparing the two years. During the 2002-2003, the DFG schools experienced an increase in their Partial Proficient levels by as much as 1.4% and an increase of 1.2% and 0.5% in Advanced Proficient in DFG schools for District Q and District R respectively.

With respect to mathematics, the students' performances on the HSPA in 2002-2003 were improved in District Q by 12.4% and 2.3% in District R when comparing the combined Proficient and Advanced Proficient measures. During the same time period, Partial Proficient levels decreased by 12.4% in District Q and 2.3% in District R. Both small districts outperformed their DFG counterparts by 8% in District Q and by 5.3% in District R as well as outscoring the NJ State Average when using the Proficient and Advanced Proficient combined measures.

Table 12

**2001 – 2003 GRADE 11 HSPA RESULTS, GRADUATION & DROPOUT RATES FOR
SELECTED NJ SMALL SCHOOLS**

School District	Grade Levels	No. Tested	HSPA LA						HSPA MATH					
			2001-2002						2001-2002					
			School			DFG			School			DFG		
			PP	P	AP	PP	P	AP	PP	P	AP	PP	P	AP
District Q	7-12	57	19.3	68.4	12.3	13.3	71.1	15.6	31	55.2	13.8	24.1	54.8	21.1
District R	9-12	150	12	78.7	9.3	15.7	72.4	11.9	30	54.7	15.3	30.2	55.7	14.1
NJ State Average			18.9	66.3	14.8				31.4	49.5	19.1			

School District	Grade Levels	No. Tested	HSPA LA						HSPA MATH					
			2002-2003						2002-2003					
			School			DFG			School			DFG		
			PP	P	AP	PP	P	AP	PP	P	AP	PP	P	AP
District Q	7-12	43	11.6	72.1	16.3	13.7	69.5	16.8	18.6	65.1	16.3	26.6	52.4	21
District R	9-12	113	17.7	64.6	17.7	17.1	70.5	12.4	27.7	59.8	12.5	32.9	52.9	14.1
NJ State Average			19.8	65	15.1				34.2	46.4	19.5			

School District	Grade Levels		Dropout Rates (%)		Graduation Rates (%)
			2001-2002	2002-2003	2002-2003
District Q	7-12		1.3	*	93.3
District R	9-12		2.7	1.4	90.5
NJ State Average			2.6	1.9	89.4

* Dropout rate not available.

Dropout Rates/Graduation Rates

The dropout rates in each of the two small high schools in this study were generally lower than the dropout rates of other schools in the state. The dropout rate in 2001-2002 in District Q was 1.3% or half the NJ State Average (2.6%). District R was only 0.1% higher than the NJ State Average of 2.6% in 2002, but in 2003 District R's dropout rate was again lower than the NJ State Average of 1.9% for that year affirming that the dropout rates were typically lower in small schools (Pittman & Haughwout, 1987). The research has established that anything that keeps students in school is an excellent long-term investment. Researchers have estimated that each year of secondary school that a student received reduced the probability of public welfare dependency as an adult by 35%. A single year's class of dropouts, over their lifetimes, costs the nation approximately \$260 billion in foregone taxes and lost earnings alone Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1988).

The opposite of dropout is graduation. Graduation rates in both District Q and District R were higher than the NJ State Average (89.4%) by 3.9% and 1.1% respectively in 2002-2003. A study of 128 New York City small high schools found that although the cost per pupil was higher than in much larger schools, when the higher graduation rates were taken into account 63.2% for smaller schools as compared with 55.9% in larger high schools, the small high schools actually only spent \$25 more per student (Stiefel, P. Iatarola, N. Fruchter, & Berne, 1998). The researchers concluded that although the smaller high schools had somewhat higher costs per student, their much higher graduation rates and lower dropout rates produced among the lowest costs per graduate in the entire system.

Presentation of Overall Responses

The 21 participants for this study were part of a focus group or a one-on-one interview. The participants included 12 Superintendents/Chief School Administrators, one Assistant Superintendent, two Principals, one Assistant Principal, one Director, two Boards of Education Presidents, a Business Administrator, and one District Auditor (See Table 3, p. 60). The 21 participants in the study represented 18 schools. Three participants were from duplicate districts, which included a school that had a participant in the study. Each participant responded to ten questions either as part of a focus group or in a one-on-one interview session. The researcher read each question to the focus group participants or interviewee. Appendix C presents the responses for each participant organized by the interview questions.

Analysis of Overall Responses

In Chapter II the review of the research and relevant literature examining small schools was presented in four sections: (1) background of small schools, (2) benefits of small schools, (3) organization of schools, (4) funding and operating costs of small schools. This section presents an analysis of the responses of the 21 participants encompassing these topics and the research questions for this study.

The purpose of the opening interview questions was to promote involvement and establish a comfort level between the researcher and the participants. The questions provided the participants the opportunity to share their roles and experiences in education. Each participant shared their current position as an administrator or school

district employee, their number of years in education ranging from 6 to 43 years, and their definition of a small school (See Table 13).

Most of the participants used the number of students in a school to define the term small school. The number of students referenced for a small school was consistent with the research (Boyer, 1995; Cotton, 1996; Williams, 1990) ranging at approximately 400 for an elementary school and 500-800 for a secondary school. Eight of the participants also referred to a small school as one single school building in the district.

Beyond quantities of students or buildings, the participants also mentioned that small schools meant fostering relationships. There was a environment that the participants referred to as a “caring environment” where all members of the school felt like a family. One Superintendent described the term as, “... a place where each child is vitally important. We build our school around our children. We provide small-group instruction and individualized instruction that a large school can’t provide. We provide a warm, caring, supportive environment that a lot of large schools can’t provide.” The Assistant Principal commented, “I think more importantly a small school is where *[sic]* it is possible to know everybody who works in or comes to and from the building.” The relationships also foster a sense of trust. A Superintendent related, “... you develop that trust, families think highly of the school and know that it is a safe place for their kids to be and all the trust is there.”

Table 13 (continues)

Background of Participants and Their Definitions of a Small School

Participant	Position in District	Years in Education	Definition of Small School or Small District
Respondent #1	Auditor	21 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One or two buildings • K-8 • 400 – 800 students
Respondent #2	Chief School Administrator	20 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One school building • 300 students or fewer K-8 • 500 students or fewer 9-12 • One community school district
Respondent #3	Chief School Administrator	29 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K-8 • Not segmented into K-2, 3-5, 6-8
Respondent #4	Asst. Super.	32 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 300 students • One building
Respondent #5	Principal	27 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal wears many hats • Handles Asst. Super. pieces, grants
Respondent #6	Director	43 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under 450 students • Soft signs of intimate, small, and supportive organization
Respondent #7	Superintendent	38 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under 2,000 students
Respondent #8	Superintendent	30 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K-6 district
Respondent #9	Chief School Administrator	20 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under 500 students • One-building with one administrator • The number of students per grade level
Respondent #10	Superintendent	25 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100 to 500 students • One building district • 75 or fewer staff members • Administration in the Super. and BA
Respondent #11	Superintendent and Principal	27 ½ years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each child is vitally important • Warm, caring, supportive environment • Goal and objectives for the school and for each child in the school
Respondent #12	Superintendent and Principal	28 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intimate environment between students and faculty • 400 students and lower • Low student to teacher ratio
Respondent #13	Business Administrator	6 years (30 years in corporate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed with the definition of Respondent #12
Respondent #14	Chief School Administrator	41 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small family like • Get to know people extremely well • Able to make compensations for people's strengths and weaknesses

Table 13**Background of Participants and Their Definitions of a Small School**

Participant	Position in District	Years in Education	Definition of Small School or Small District
Respondent #15	Board of Education President	6 ½ years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One building
Respondent #16	Chief School Administrator	35 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You can reach out to kids• You are intimately knowledgeable of them, what they do, and how they live
Respondent #17	Principal	33 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The population is very small in the community
Respondent #18	Chief School Administrator	30 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having a small enrollment• Little academies in a large high school• Less than 300 students
Respondent #19	Asst. Principal	24 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less than 500 children• Possible to know everybody who works or comes to and from the building• Children feel connected• Teachers are connected to parents
Respondent #20	Chief School Administrator	25 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One building K to 8• The Principal, teachers, bus drivers know every single student• Parents have trust that students are safe
Respondent #21	Board of Education President	20 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One building• Less than 400 students• Students have many opportunities to be involved

Research Question 1

What are the benefits of small schools for students with respect to academic achievement, attendance, graduation rates, and dropout rates? (Fowler, 1995; Lee & Smith, 1994; Molnar, 2000; Stiefel et al., 2000). The responses from questions (1-3) from the questionnaire/interview guide pertained to research question 1.

Using the categories generated from the literature review, the conceptual framework, and the participants' responses, the researcher identified the respondents' common themes and used them as the title for the nodes in the N6 software. The N6 software served as a vehicle for data clarification of the common themes that were consistently evident in the focus group and one-on-one interviews. The N6 software quantified the frequency of the common themes. In addition, the software reports provided quotes from the transcripts to elaborate on specific examples from the participants. These common themes were organized into tables that are provided along with supporting data taken from the focus group and one-on-one interviews.

As participants elaborated on benefits of small schools, their examples and stories explained benefits not only to students, but also to teachers, parents, and the community. Table 14 describes the benefits of small schools that were concentrated in the areas of school climate, communication, and relationships.

Table 14

**Common Themes and Transcript Examples for Research Question #1
Generated from N6 Software**

Category	Common Theme	Examples from Focus Group and One-on-One Interview Transcripts
Benefits of small schools	School climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling like a family • Homey atmosphere • Feeling of safety • High level of trust in the school
	Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier due to smaller numbers of students • Early intervention of special needs students • More parental contact than in large schools
	Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration and faculty know all the children in the school • Students don't fall through the cracks • More individualized attention than in large schools

The small school climate and atmosphere were characterized as feeling like home and as one big family. The Auditor, who worked in many small schools and whose children went to a small school, commented that, "Students aren't numbers. The administration knows the students. It's more of a homey atmosphere, more conducive to learning." A Superintendent described his school as a "school family." He explained that, "We are all in this together and everyone in the family has a different job to do and the primary job of our school is to have children feel comfortable and safe and learn as much as they can."

With regard to communication, more than half of the participants described how communication was much easier in a small school than in a large school based primarily on the smaller numbers of students. Teachers, administrators and even bus drivers knew every child in the school. During a tour in District B, the Chief School Administrator

knew the names of every child she came in contact with and also asked personal questions about one student's previous night athletics game was and how another student's sister was who had been out sick the last week. As one Chief School Administrator described, "Every kid knows me in the school and I know every child here and I know them on personal levels. I know what is going on in the family. I know when I can tease them and make them laugh and I know when to step back and let them have some space because they may be going through a particularly tough issue." On several occasions the participants relayed that a primary benefit was that, "Students don't fall through the cracks." This benefit was due in part to the relationships that were formed and the accountability that had been built (Meier, 1996).

A Principal relayed that a common phrase he heard often was that in small schools, "You get a private school education in a public school" describing the intimate relationships found in his small school. Another Principal characterized her teachers as the students' cheerleaders who provided students with a sense that they weren't going it alone.

A Business Administrator and a Chief School Administrator explained that the heightened communication especially benefited students with special needs. The Chief School Administrator commented that, "There is just an immediate understanding of the child and his or her needs and if there is anything wrong, you pick up on it right away. I would say that intervention occurs at any earlier age than in larger districts." As the Business Administrator described, "The kids who [*sic*] have special needs are identified early and the communication is there. They identify kids upfront and try to intervene to help bring them along if in fact they need some supplementary help."

A Superintendent explained that, “Faculty members can really get to know kids, get to know their backgrounds, and get to know families.” He expressed his frustration with a large high school in his previous district where he felt, “... there are a lot of kids that we are losing as a result of the size of schools. These large high schools depersonalize. Kids are getting lost. They don’t know anybody in the school. There’s not a connection between the staff and the child.” Similarly, the Assistant Principal explained that the teachers in a large elementary school did not feel connected. He explained that teachers didn’t know everyone, “The schedule won’t allow them to have the interaction that they want. I think the term they used was isolated and the children feel similarly.”

Research Question 2

What benefits do small schools provide to their communities? (Berry, 1993; Fanning, 1995; Lyson, 2002; Nachtigal, 1994; Rutter, 1988) The responses from questions (4-5) from the question route pertained to research question 2.

There was unanimous agreement among the participants in this study that a community benefited in a number of ways from having a small school within it. The schools were described as being the center of community events and the focal point for the community (See Table 15). The events include holiday celebrations, fundraisers, social gatherings such as the international film festival and a variety of sports events. The school as a gathering site was not limited to functions for students, but also for other community groups such as senior citizens.

Administrators shared the various types of outreach that were sponsored by the school to bring senior citizens into the school. Such programs included a Senior Friends Reading Program, senior breakfasts, computer programming courses, and art programs. One Superintendent commented that, "...we feel it is important for our sixth graders to serve the senior citizens. We might tie that (breakfast) into a science fair so that the senior citizens can see these great things." Eight of the participants spoke about how there were often multiple generations who had gone to their small school and therefore many traditions were still a part of the school. A Chief School Administrator relayed, "We have people whose parents went here, whose grandparents went here, and whose great-grandparents went here. I mean we look at photos from the 1870's and we can pick out all these ancestors of all of our students. So there is a lot of legacy in terms of the school."

Table 15

**Common Themes and Transcript Examples for Research Question #2
Generated from N6 Software**

Category	Common Theme	Examples from Focus Group and One-on-One Interview Transcripts
Benefits to the community	Center of the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases community involvement • Informal community interactions (more in districts without busing)
	Focal point for social events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holiday events • Fund raisers • Social gatherings • Sports events
	Family connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple generations have gone through the school and relatives still live in the community • High level of community support

Another Chief School Administrator shared the story of a community member who would use the back door of the school as a short cut to the grocery store across from the school. This same Administrator explained that small schools also benefited the community by not having “to go through as many levels of personnel to get issues dealt with to their satisfaction.” He explained that, “the level of accountability and I think the level of communication was a lot more precise in a smaller district than in a larger district.”

The level of communication was fostered by the relationships that were developed with the community. Administrators cited specific examples of how community relationships were an integral part of running their schools. The community was involved in making decisions for planning a new addition, publishing a joint community and school newsletter, erecting playground equipment, hosting an international film festival, or just making it “a branch of their own homes.” A School Board President recounted how the community came together to decide if their small school would be able to continue running. Once the community engaged in a decision-analysis process there was overwhelming support for the school to continue in the community. As the (then) Interim-Superintendent explained, “They were supportive of the fact that the school should exist. And I think it was because of the school itself being the focal point of the community. So, when you have a small school that is reaching out to the community and reaching out to the parents and touching kids and making a difference in their lives, the community will support that. When you have a very large bureaucracy whose members remove [*sic*] themselves sometimes from the community, it is really difficult to get that type of support.”

Another theme that recurred as a benefit for the community, the students, and the Administrators was the lack of busing in many of the small school districts. In eight of the small schools in this study, students lived within walking distance of the school. Therefore, parents dropped off and picked up children each day. These drop-off times were opportunities for high levels of informal interaction between teachers and parents, Administrators and parents, and parents with other parents. One Superintendent commented that the discussions during arrival and dismissal “definitely keep your finger on the pulse of the community and it is a great tool to use to know what is going on in the community.” Another Chief School Administrator referred to his playground as the “the town square so to speak” where parents talked about what was going on in town, their church, and the school. He used this opportunity to deal directly with what was in the “rumor mill” before it became a much bigger issue. The issue of buses was quite a different scenario for the Assistant Principal who reminisced about busing not being an issue in his former district or his children’s school. However, his current school’s problems with busing monopolized an inordinate amount of his time on a daily basis.

He described the daily barrage of nearly 150 parents wanting to pick up their children in order to avoid sending them home on a bus that took as much as an hour and a half for students living on the outskirts of the town. The coordination of the 52 buses required both physical and mental energy to deal with being present to supervise the loading and unloading, as well as with not being present when the numerous issues arose while students were on the buses. As he explained it, “I spend a lot of time dealing with issues that the bus drivers come up with which could be avoided by eliminating that time on the bus.”

Research Question 3

What challenges do small schools face in maintaining fiscal viability (Lawrence, 2002; Stiefel et al., 2000) and competitive curricula (Roellke, 1996; Sanders, 1988)? The responses from questions (5-7) from the question route pertained to research question 3.

When the participants were discussing the challenges of small schools, all 21 cited financial obstacles in the form of too few resources, high administrative costs, and budgetary constraints as being the most challenging to small schools (See Table 16). As one Superintendent highlighted, "The most challenging part of my job is to make it work with less money every year and I feel that we are getting squeezed to the point where, you know, we could all go away because of that."

Table 16

**Common Themes and Transcript Examples for Research Question #3
Generated from N6 Software**

Category	Common Theme	Examples from Focus Group and One-on-One Interview Transcripts
Challenges of small schools	Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sharing resources• Administrative costs penalties• NJ property tax system to fund schools
	General	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of resources• Dept. of Education• S1701*• Needing to do multiple roles in the building• Concern of having to regionalize/consolidate
	Maintaining current curricula	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Abundance of resources are unavailable• Having enough staff to be involved in the curricular process• More of a challenge for the high school level than at the elementary level

*(See definition).

Among the resources that some of the small schools lacked were the funds to support “the extras” such as the extra-curricular programs outside of the school. Some districts ran intramurals in-house rather than having traveling teams. Due to these constraints however, the participants explained that the faculty came together to provide opportunities for students to feel part of their school beyond the academics in the classroom. A Board of Education President shared that high school students in his district had large numbers of activities on their transcripts due to the fact that there were many opportunities for students to participate in at his high school.

The participants frequently used the term “creative” with regard to the financial obstacles. As one Superintendent explained, “You have to be very creative and districts are looking at creative ways in order to run their systems and still maintain the qualities that they have.” These creative opportunities have been found in the ways the small districts have worked to be more efficient. The Superintendent in District F elaborated on the severity of the financial issues. He commented, “This is an issue that is affecting many small districts that are in the state of New Jersey. I feel that if we don’t find a solution to that, we are going to lose a tremendous asset and the asset is that small is better.” The problem at the state level was in the limited amounts of state aid that school districts received and in the property taxes used to fund schools.

The participants cited additional challenges brought on by mandates at the state level. The state mandated a variety of school requirements, yet the state aid received by districts hadn’t been adequate to fully fund the mandates. A Chief School Administrator explained, the state aid formula was insufficient based on how it was calculated. He described how the income portion of the formula was non-specific as to where you

actually lived, but rather based on your zip code. With surrounding towns that were much wealthier having the same zip code, his state aid was lessened because of the income reported by wealthy homeowners whose property tax dollars weren't part of his town. He strongly felt that New Jersey "has to take a serious look at this regressive property tax that it uses to fund schools. It just doesn't work."

The financial challenges were also characterized by the penalties of how the administrative costs were defined. Participants commented that there was vagueness in the components and the inclusion of such a wide variety of costs beyond the administrator's salary. According to a Chief School Administrator, the way in which administrative costs are reported distorts them, "It is a much bigger cost and what it doesn't take into account is that the administrator of a small school often plays multiple roles. For example, I am the No Child Left Behind grant coordinator. I am the Title IV coordinator. I am the Affirmative Action coordinator. I am the staff developer. I am the facilities manager. But they only look at that one little piece and it is calculated according to this budgetary formula, but might not necessarily be indicative of your actual circumstances." Stephens (1987) asserted that the superintendent of a large district has an extensive support staff to assist in the interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles, while the superintendent of a small school district does not. Consequently, the major responsibility for planning, organizing, directing, evaluating, and leading the district was solely in the hands of one individual. Stephens (1987, pp. 185-186) suggested that a "degree of reasonableness be injected into the discussion and that failure to acknowledge the peculiarities is likely to add unreasonable burdens to those individuals" (p. 185-6). Another Chief School Administrator commented, "There are so

many ancillary costs that really are not administrative in terms of the person who is in charge of the building, the salaried person, that it is a hard concept to get across to people and I actually think it was designed to do that in an effort to make the smaller schools look less attractive in an effort to do away with the smaller schools". The majority of the responding administrators shared how they needed to "wear many hats" in order to run a small school in an effort "to do it all".

A Chief School Administrator voiced concern regarding the perceptions on the part of her and her colleagues where districts were given budgetary restrictions. These were concerns related to the administrative costs restrictions that were made public after the district budgets had been developed and on the eve of putting them to the voters. She continued by stating, "If they [NJ DOE] are truly trying to reduce costs and not just be punitive, they would have been working with us a whole six months, eight months, a year in advance and say look, this is an issue that we're concerned about hiding administrative costs and inefficiencies in districts. That's going to come back and sort of work with districts, if they are truly trying to lower that."

The New Jersey State Legislative Bill S-1701/A-99 was frequently a topic discussed as part of the challenges to small schools. Small school administrators stated that they were being penalized for being proactive in their financial planning. They described how surplus funds that they kept in the event they needed to make capital improvements or had a special education student enter their district would be taken away. These concerns were actualized in one district where a child requiring an out-of-district placement cost the district \$80,000, which had an enormous impact on their \$2 million budget. Consequently, they had to cut their already part-time special-area teachers even

further. The foreign language teacher, the physical education teacher, and the hot lunch program were cut back in order to absorb the costs of the private institution for the special education student.

A Business Administrator characterized Bill S1701 as “a hodge-podge”. He described it as being “politically motivated strictly to give a one-year tax rebate so that people could be re-elected” and that “long term it has very severe consequences”. A Superintendent echoed these concerns: “We run a very tight budget and build surpluses. Unfortunately, that all got changed with 1701”.

The challenges in providing a competitive curriculum were in the limited resources of planning time and personnel dedicated to one curricular area as well as the issues that arose from part-time personnel. Because most of the small schools had either one or two teachers per grade level, there were limitations in the ability to collaborate and in a few districts with scheduling in order to articulate the curricular issues.

Three administrators raised concerns about part-time or half-time personnel as being a challenge to the curriculum. The Director explained that, “Half-time teachers whom most small schools employ have mixed loyalties because they may be in three other schools.” Teachers who may only be in a school one or two days a week also diminished the flexibility in scheduling according to a Superintendent.

Seven of the 21 participants commented on the advantages small districts had in curriculum development. One Superintendent shared that his perceptions of curriculum development in small districts changed after seeing the revisions and the processes that were happening in his small district. He relayed that, “small districts can empower their teachers to be the curriculum leaders and administrators in small districts must be

curriculum leaders. It is also an opportunity for teachers to step up and play a different role and maybe a role that they were playing many, many years ago when schools weren't so big." Another Superintendent explained that he made "curriculum changes based on what we feel our needs are and in a smaller school we can make those changes without going through a lot of bureaucratic red tape. Actually, what I like about smaller districts is that you can get more done in a short period of time." Another Superintendent explained, "You can just come in, train the teachers, get it done, and check in with them. So I think you can quickly adopt a new series and get support for that."

These financial and curricular challenges led some participants to voice concerns regarding the push for consolidation and regionalization of their small schools. Seven of the 21 participants discussed the consolidation or regionalization discussions that had taken place prior to or during their time in the district. The rationale for considering combining with another school was based on potential cost savings and increasing programs. These issues were brought to the school board usually by a small community group or by pressure from the state.

A Chief School Administrator raised concern that, "When you look at the regionalization issue, you can't make a blanket statement. You need to look at schools independently." Schools also need to be looked at through more than just the financial lens, relayed another Superintendent.

In 2001, a regionalization feasibility study was completed with two other elementary schools and District K with the regional high school. In the final analysis, District K and another of the elementary schools would incur an increase in their taxes, while the remaining elementary school and the regional high school would experience a

tax decrease for at least the first year. The plan to regionalize was therefore no longer considered. In another district, the regionalization proposal went to the two communities three times before it was approved. A Principal commented that the push had come from the parents at the high school level to bring the two schools together to have more programs. She explained that the elementary schools were not in favor of the merger and never consolidated. They ran their elementary schools as separate entities under one district name and budget.

The future direction of District D was a topic of discussion in 2002. The school board minutes described how the Board of Education conducted a series of meetings to use a model of decision making, decision analysis, to determine whether the school would continue to exist with a principal, consolidate with another district, regionalize, or contract with a consortium for shared administrative services. The community's ultimate decision was to enter into a shared-services agreement with a neighboring town for superintendent and business administrator services. The decision was based on the decision-analysis model and a 50% return rate on a community survey that resulted in an overwhelming favorable response for keeping the school open. The School Board President explained that the community really came together and decided on best course of action for the students. He cautioned that, "If you draw your conclusions from those who [*sic*] show up at a board meeting, you can quickly draw a conclusion that if that represents the community for example, we would have thought that everyone wanted this school closed. I learned that those who want to be vocal and are against something will show up and be vocal, but those who are happy and satisfied, typically won't show up a meeting."

District H had been part of several regionalization feasibility studies in its more than 100 years as a one-building small school district. Surprising, this school was slated to be closed in the planning of the 1974 regionalization study. Not surprising to the researcher was the fact that on the public survey, the community was asked if they would be in favor of a plan to change where their child went to school if it led to savings in tax dollars. Also not surprising, the main concern on the part of the three communities was busing.

The *Trenton Times* ran a story in 1980 on the regionalization that was being considered in District H. A resident expressed his concern over the rumblings that the state Department of Education in Trenton was “phasing-out small, inefficient school districts”(Gill, 1980). The PTO president was quoted as to the level of town support for the school and the common thread of benefits were woven throughout the article. The small class sizes, no busing, and “a shaping of healthy pupil attitudes about the world, about other people, and about themselves” were among those mentioned (p. E2).

Research Question 4

What organizational practices and strategies have small school administrators used in an effort to contain costs and to provide competitive curricula (Bryk & Driscoll, 1998; Dewees, 1999; Hughes et al., 1971; Monk & Haller, 1986; Wasley et al., 2000)? The responses to questions (8 and 10) from the question route pertained to research question 4.

The participants expanded upon nine key organizational practices to contain costs as outlined in Table 17. In addition to the nine organizational practices, responses in

Table 17 denote the districts (A through R) in which district administrators used the practices and the function of them in the district. Among the organizational practices most often used were what participants referred to as “creative solutions” to services, practices, and programs implemented in their schools. Shared-services were frequently used practices. The Administrators described how they collaborated with other districts to share special area teachers, superintendent services, and business administrator services in order to have the expertise in the building while not having to cover the entire salaries of these positions. A Chief School Administrator explained that services were shared with a neighboring district to cover the cost of the Business Administrator with the added benefit, “that we can supplement her salary so that she can be full time in a competitive salary range, and they have stability with their Business Administrator. So it is kind of a symbiotic relationship.” Another Chief School Administrator outlined how his school shared the Business Administrator, a French teacher, a computer teacher, an Algebra teacher, a custodian, and cafeteria services. He commented, “So if I look at what I actually have left in terms of the core staff, I’m talking about maybe eight or nine people and the rest are shared with other locals. We are managing to maintain costs.”

Table 17

Organizational Practices to Contain Costs Generated from N6 Software

Districts	Organization Practice	Function in the District
A, C, D, G, H, I, L, M,	Shared-Services	Assistive technology devices, professional development, teachers, superintendent, business administrator, custodians
A, B, C, D, H, I, J, K, L, M, O, P, Q, R	Education Consortium	Bulk purchasing of food service, energy, computers, transportation, school supplies, paper, ink cartridges, telephone services, gasoline, fuel oil
A, I, J	Education Foundation	Mini grants, field trips, summer programs
A, C,	School Choice Program	Tuition based program
B, C, D, G, K, P	Student placement	Special Education services provided in-house, pre-school program
A, K, O, P	Stipends	Curriculum writing, professional development
H, L	Multi-age classrooms	Two grades per class (e.g. first and second grade)
A, D, H, I, J	Grants	Professional development, author visits, assemblies
A, B, D, F, H, I, J, K, L, O, P	Inter-district collaboration	Professional development, state reports, curricula development and revision

When asked to elaborate on the school's shared-services agreement, a School Board President commented, "It is a relationship. It's like any other interpersonal relationship. You really have to work at it to keep it going smoothly." The participants overwhelmingly supported the need to share services. As an Assistant Superintendent emphasized, "The Department of Education and even the Governor has been resistant to forced regionalization, but I think all of the legislation that is coming down is a clear message that if you don't begin to become more creative in sharing services and sharing services with districts and teaming up with districts that eventually you are not going to operate any more."

Study participants also touted the benefits of being part of an education consortium. Fourteen of the 21 participants referenced being part of some type of consortium. The consortia offered school districts discounts through bulk buying and for services including transportation and telephone, paper and school supplies, and energy resources from electricity to fuel oil.

Relationship building was demonstrated by the number of participants who highlighted the collaborative work they had done with other districts. Inter-district collaboration played a pinnacle role in the organization practices in most of the school districts. During a focus group interview, a Superintendent described how the three elementary school that were sending districts to the high school worked as though they were a K-12 district with three elementary schools and a high school. He explained that, "It is just like a district of four schools is how we run it. So we touch base for back to school nights, concerts, and parent conferences. We meet the four of us on a monthly basis and then the superintendents in the county meet on a monthly basis so we get lots of

opportunity for networking.” Those monthly meetings also afforded the superintendents the time to share materials and discuss workshops that each may not have attended.

Three of the district administrators explained how their educational foundations provided resources and funds for equipment or services that they could not afford to purchase from their budgets. Grant writing was another avenue for funds to cover professional development or student activities such as author visits or assemblies. The administrators lamented that with the responsibilities of state reports and the general running of their buildings, they were left with little time to write grants since there weren’t assigned district personnel to write grants as in many large schools.

Additional practices that district leaders used toward containing costs were to address placement of specific groups of students in their districts, offer stipends to teachers, to combine grade levels into one classroom, and to limit non-teaching positions. The exorbitant cost for educating Special Education students was a common theme throughout the financial interviews with district participants. To manage these costs, some district leaders found cost saving measures in hiring Special Education staff to provide services to students in-district versus sending students out of district for the same services. Savings were not only in the tuition costs, but also in transporting these students.

Stipends were offered to staff members for curriculum revision and for professional development. Small district administrators often found the costs to hire outside consultants to be unaffordable unless they joined forces with their colleagues in neighboring districts and brought all of the districts’ teachers together to participate in a workshop. In two districts students from two grade levels were brought together to form

multi-age classrooms as a cost-saving measure. Districts would therefore hire one teacher to span the two grade levels. Administrators spoke of the educational value of such a configuration for addressing the variety of academic readiness needs of students.

As a cost saving measure, in some cases the non-teaching positions became a matter of what the school could afford and a “priority list” had to be developed, according to the Assistant Superintendent. The Director stated strongly that the use of non-teaching positions was a critical element in containing costs. He clarified that he “wouldn’t sacrifice anything that has to do directly with the classroom teachers”; however non-classroom teachers who were supervisors should be controlled.

Other programs that small school administrators turned to were to apply for the Inter-district Public School Choice Program and to develop a pre-school program in their district. The two small school districts that were part of the School Choice Program received additional state aid for those students who were from neighboring districts. The four districts with pre-school programs offered the program to out-of-district students as well on a tuition basis. These pre-school programs allowed the school districts to save the cost of sending these students to other districts or other pre-school facilities.

When participants were asked about what organizational practices they had used to maintain a current curriculum, they referenced their five-year curriculum cycle and the articulations across districts, especially in those districts where the elementary school was one of the sending districts to a regional high school (See Table 18). Efforts were made to address the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards and “All four of the sending districts have representatives for each curriculum area and they meet three or four times a year at the high school with the high school department chairs to make sure

that we're all sending the kids to the district at the same level." Another Superintendent who shared a common curriculum with other small schools commented, "the outline and the program itself is consistent so that when our eighth graders join the other districts at the high school, we know educationally there is a seamless process."

Table 18

**Common Themes and Transcript Examples for Research Question #4
Generated from N6 Software Relating to Organizational Practices**

Category	Common Theme	Examples from Focus Group and One-on-One Interview Transcripts
Organization practices	To maintain current curricula	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five-year curriculum cycle • Articulation with other small school districts • Consortia with sending districts • Participation in county articulation meetings (cluster meetings)
	Limiting non-teaching positions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess needs annually

Articulation also came in the form of cluster meetings where districts had a curriculum coordinator who worked for a group of small school districts. Each district contributed to a stipend that the teacher was paid to write one curriculum document that was shared among all the districts. One district Superintendent commented, "So what many districts may do as part of an intra-district operation, we do inter-district."

One Superintendent shared the importance of teams of teachers who went through a process of revising and assessing the effectiveness of their curricula. This process involved identifying and visiting lighthouse districts for teachers, "to become dissatisfied

with what they had.” He shared that he wanted to, “...educate them of what was going on beyond the school district and so teams went out looking at school districts that had state-of-the-art language arts programs or math programs the were outstanding.” After dialoguing, teachers would make their recommendations and would be responsible for the implementation. Other participants characterized a similar process. One Superintendent commented, “You can do that much more effectively in small districts; as soon as you get large, you get big and you have layers of bureaucracy and that creates turf wars. I have been in districts that have been large and you spend a lot of time trying to get though all of the various layers. Small districts can make change much more rapidly than a large district.”

The Vice Principal relayed that while in a previous supervisory role of a large district he was to supervise over 250 teachers. He described, “There is no way that I can personally meet 250 people and make sure they understand the curriculum. If teachers don’t understand the curriculum, they can’t teach it in the way that you intended it. So while you have a talent pool, you also have a talent drain maybe and a lot of curriculum deviance. I don’t see that in small schools much at all.”

With processes for curriculum revision and articulation in place, administrators focused on providing the time for their teachers to meet and conduct their discussions. A Superintendent also made an effort to have study groups. However, pulling from the same group of people and asking too much from the staff was a noteworthy caution that was mentioned.

Research Question 5

How can school district administrators organize, operate, and communicate to afford the benefits of small schools while utilizing the economy of scale? (Andrews et al., 1995; Gregory, 2000; C. Howley, 1996) The responses to question 9 from the question route pertained to research question 5.

When participants were asked about practices they used embodying economies of scale toward containing costs, they offered a variety of cost-saving measures (See Table 19). Among them were consolidating of state reports, being part of consortia, and the fostering of relationships. A Chief School Administrator explained that, “There are always these plans that you have to do and a lot of times I would say, are you going to have time to do it or have time to write the plan, but I don’t have time to do both.” Rather, using the economy of scale was suggested in the completing of these reports. The thinking was that there would be one technology plan requiring, “one report for the K-12 sending districts” or for the county. Another Principal asserted that all the same reports are expected of small districts as in large districts, without having the additional personnel to offer the needed assistance.

Table 19

**Common Themes and Transcript Examples for Research Question #5
Generated from N6 Software Relating to Economy of Scale**

Category	Common Theme	Examples from Focus Group and One-on-One Interview Transcripts
Economy of scale	Effective and efficient small school practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidation of required state reports • Participation in purchasing consortia • Shared-services • Educational foundations
	Additional recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-school and handicap programs on a tuition basis for other schools • Building relationships

Many of the participants cited being part of a consortium as the primary way that they were able to incorporate economy of scale into their schools. The Business Administrator explained how his school was part of a number of consortia for electricity, fuel oil, insurance rates, transportation for Special Education students, and paper goods. “We are not going and getting rates based on a little single school. We’re getting rates based on a hundred schools” was his description. A Superintendent highlighted how he worked with his neighboring districts and collectively provided professional development for all staff members. He commented, “I could not afford to bring in a guest speaker, but if we all pulled our resources as a larger regional district, we could do that so the economy of scale works.” Other relationships between districts were fostered to share programs and share services.

Small district leaders worked collaboratively to offer programs to neighboring schools on a tuition basis. One district with a pre-school handicap class offered other schools the opportunity to send students on a tuition basis to fill the empty seats in their program. A School Board President discussed how shared-services for the Superintendent and Business Administrator with a neighboring district had a tremendous cost savings impact on the district and, “By not impacting directly in the classroom and sharing those services administratively, we have taken advantage of the economies of scale without changing the environment in the classroom.” Relationships with community members and businesses, who could offer cost saving measures, was how a Chief School Administrator explained it when she commented, “I think it is more formed by relationships around here than brought on by costs to foster relationships more than anything.”

As the participants shared the many examples of how economy of scale worked to reduce costs, some participants took issue with the idea used in reference to small schools. The Superintendent in District E called the use of economies of scale, “the biggest fallacy that we have in education is that we are running schools like factories. We’re a school and we are not making widgets and the fact that large is better is not so.” He went on to say, “You know factories now are starting to realize that what we need to do is decentralize and empower our workers and create small units, independent units who can be creative and be able to look at different solutions. The research is not telling us that the factory model is the best for kids.”

A Principal voiced concern by stating, “I do not believe that taking a model from industry is a good thing. I don’t think you can run a school like a business.” The main

concern was not in what could be gained, but rather with what was lost in the pursuit of saving costs in the explanation, "When you increase the size of the facility, you can accommodate more kids and have a bigger library and a better gym and a better this and a better that, but I think that the intangibles that you are sacrificing may not be visible immediately, but eventually I think you are going to pay a price for that." The Assistant Principal raised a similar concern when he shared, "We are not here to process children from kindergarten through twelfth grade. We are not a pass through agency. We should latch onto children when they arrive in kindergarten and see them through as personally as possible when they graduate." When schools become too large, he felt they sent the message to a student that, "I am a cog in a wheel and I have to fit and I am going to be more like everyone to survive." He felt the human cost was not worth the economy of scale it provided as he compared his work in both large and small schools. A Chief School Administrator concluded by expressing, "I honestly can't see that by increasing the size of the facility that our production costs would go down because there would be still the costs that would be in some line item because someone has to do the job."

Figure 2, represents the overlapping cluster model for small schools found in this study. Among the benefits and challenges of small schools were the organization practices used by small school administrators and employees to contain costs and provide competitive curricula.

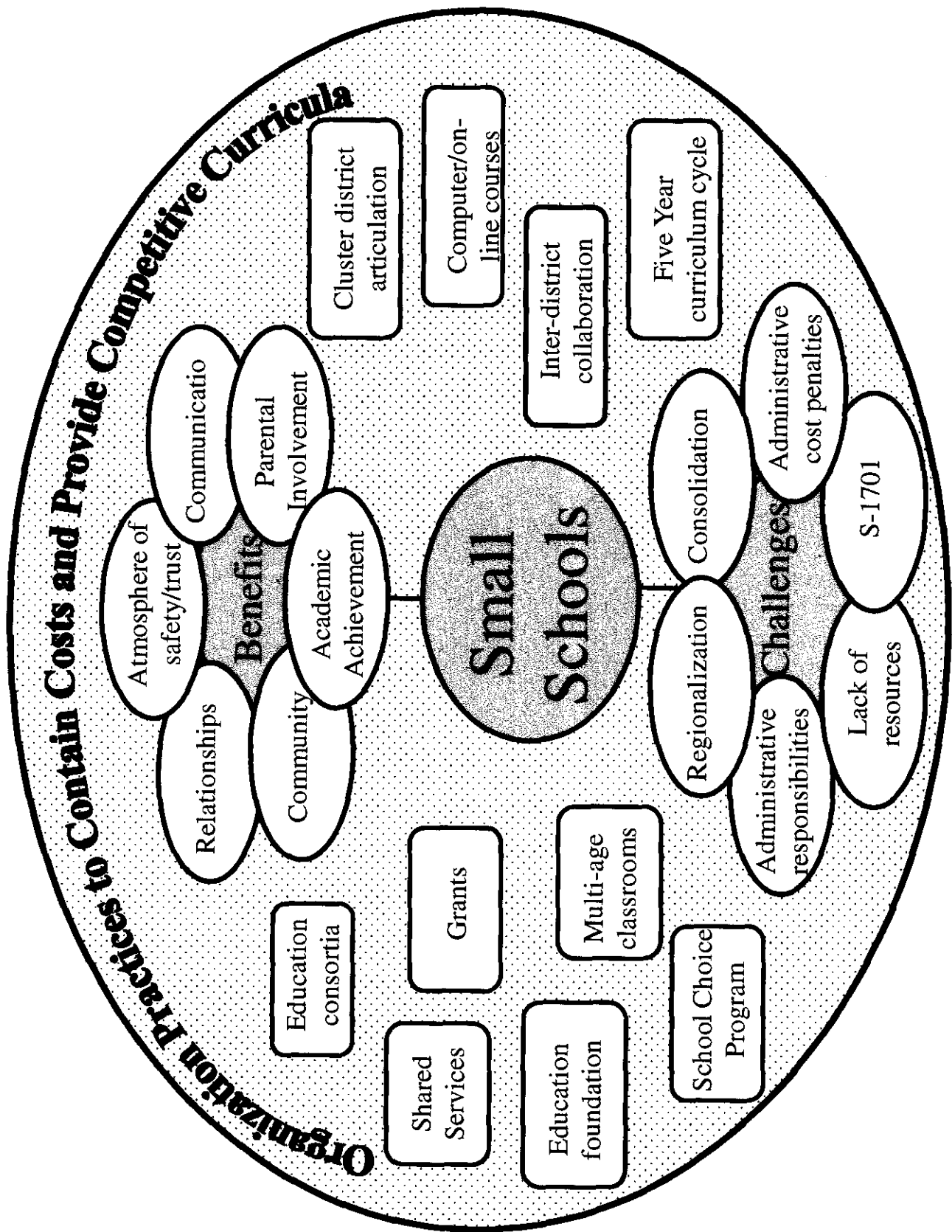


Figure 2: Small Schools Overlapping Cluster Model of Organizational Practices

Summary of Chapter IV

This chapter opened with an introduction and the organization of the analysis of the data and findings. The analysis of the descriptive data identified the empirical data for the districts studied. Also presented were the organization strategies that were evident in the focus group and one-on-one interview transcriptions in overcoming challenges, while providing the benefits and a quality education in small schools in the presentation of the overall responses. The pertinent issues raised through responses to the research and subsidiary questions were addressed in the analysis of the overall responses. The quantitative data performance information was presented in comparison to the New Jersey State Average and other schools in the small schools' district factor groups. The chapter concluded with a summary.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

The purposes of the study were to examine the benefits (outputs) of small schools regarding academic achievement, attendance, graduation rates, and dropout rates; to identify how small schools and small districts in New Jersey and elsewhere have used organizational practices and strategies toward cost containment and competitive curricula; and to recommend to superintendents, principals, and boards of education members those effective and efficient practices (inputs) offering fiscal and programmatic viability for small schools.

Overview

Chapter V presents a summary of the study, findings and conclusions, and implications that resulted from the data analysis and consideration of the findings as given in Chapter IV. The prominent themes of the findings are included in the chapter. There are also recommendations for federal, state and public school policy; and for further research, followed by concluding comments.

Research Questions

In this study, the researcher answered the following questions:

- What are the benefits of small schools for students with respect to academic achievement, attendance, graduation rates, and dropout rates?

- What benefits do small schools provide to their communities?
- What challenges do small schools face in maintaining fiscal viability and competitive curricula?
- What organizational practices and strategies have small-school administrators used in an effort to contain costs and to provide competitive curricula?
- How can school district administrators organize, operate, and communicate to afford the benefits of small schools while utilizing the economy of scale?

Synopsis of Chapters I - V

In Chapter I of this study, the researcher presented background information, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the limitations and the delimitations, the significance of the study, and the definition of terms. The focus of Chapter II was to present a background on the history of small schools, the benefits for students who attend them and the communities in which the small schools exist, the organization of small schools and small learning communities, as well as funding and containment steps for operating costs. Chapter III delineated the methodology, research design, data, methods, instrumentation, participants, collection of data, and data analysis processes. The research findings were presented in Chapter IV with an organization of the analysis, including the quantitative analysis section in the form of a descriptive data on the small schools studied. The qualitative analysis section was comprised of an analysis of the overall responses from the participants as well as observations by the researcher toward each research question and identification of common themes. Chapter

V presented the findings, conclusions, and implications of the study, as well as recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Study

The latest research and education literature have documented the positive benefits of small schools over their larger school counterparts on a number of measures. Among the core findings was the move to small schools and small classes being deeply rooted in the belief that knowing students intimately and encouraging them to participate are keys to education outcomes. Despite the current research and literature in support of the effectiveness of small schools, the determinants of school size are not often enough the result of such research. Williams reported that school size is the result of political, economic, social, and demographic factors (quoted in Cotton, 1996).

Many researchers have studied the influence of school size on student achievement. The seminal works on the opposing sides of the small school debate are *The American High School Today* written by Conant (1959) and *Big School, Small School* by Barker and Gump (1964). Conant's study concluded that "comprehensive" high schools offer a wider program of foreign languages and advanced placement courses at a lower cost, despite the lack of smaller schools for comparison. Barker and Gump (1964) found that students in smaller schools excelled at all social and psychological attributes observed.

Over the past 30 years, a large body of research has rendered support to the conclusions that small schools are preferable to the large ones attended by most of our nation's high school students and growing numbers of elementary students. Public

school policy-makers and politicians, however, continued to make policy decisions that have negative implications for small schools and in some cases the education system as a whole.

While the research continues to mount on the benefits of downsizing large schools and decentralizing efforts in urban areas, the irony is that current small schools continue to struggle against forces of consolidation. Small schools in rural and suburban districts have fought for their existence against the pressures of consolidation or regionalization based on the claim that “one big school is better (and more cost efficient) than two smaller schools” (Nelson, 1985 p. 1).

Beyond costs, other arguments leveled against small schools have been their inferior curricula as compared with those of larger schools. Roellke (1996) found that overall core curriculum courses in small schools were well aligned with the national standards. He wrote that, “large size is no guarantee that [additional] courses will be offered or that student enrollments in the courses will be high” (p. 2).

Research on small schools heavily favors the benefits for students of small schools, yet some small schools await an uncertain future. To offer these schools viable solutions to their threat of closure, it seemed appropriate to study effective small schools to ascertain how they have been able to excel at the virtues of a small school. To accomplish this task, the researcher developed a set of questions to address the core areas of concern in running small schools. Other issues were addressed as student achievement and other performance and financial measures that might help identify the effectiveness and efficiency of small schools.

Among the core areas were the benefits of small schools, financial and curricular challenges, organizational strategies toward containing costs and providing competitive curricula, and using economies of scale. The researcher developed questions in order for participants to examine the practices and strategies in these core areas. The researcher presented these questions to a Jury of Experts who analyzed and critiqued them by providing feedback for refinements and clarity.

Following the collection of descriptive data on 18 small schools in New Jersey, the researcher obtained permission from the school districts and interviewed 21 participants representing district administrators, business administrators, auditors, and school board presidents. The data and results were analyzed and summarized.

Findings of the Research

The participants for this study were administrators and leaders employed in selected small public schools and/or districts in New Jersey. The participating individuals were particularly well informed, articulate, and approachable in their knowledge of small schools. Some were asked to participate in one-on-one interviews to pursue specific topics in greater depth. The interviewees were also recommended by the focus group participants as having expertise with small schools.

The background and experience from the 21 participants varied. The number of years participants worked in education, worked with various school districts, or served on the school board averaged approximately 27 years. Nearly all participants had experience in more than one school district ranging in size from extremely large county-

wide schools to small schools of fewer than 100 students and schools in inner city, suburban, and rural settings.

As defined by participants, definitions of a small school varied in the number of students much like Cotton (1996) found in the review of over 100 documents on small schools. Some participants referenced the enrollment used by the Department of Education equating the number of students in small elementary schools to about 400 students and secondary schools to approximately 800 students, which Williams (1990) indicated as an effective size for the respective small schools.

For research question one, the researcher examined the benefits of small schools in terms of attendance, academic achievement, graduation rates, and dropout rates. In the review of the literature, the researcher found that students in small schools benefited from higher academic achievement (Cotton, 1996; Fowler, 1989) especially disadvantaged students (Huang & Howley, 1993; Lee & Smith, 1994) and students in urban settings (McMullan et al., 1994). Attendance was linked to greater satisfaction in smaller schools (Barker & Gump, 1964) as well as a generally higher rate of attendance as compared to large schools (Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Walberg, 1991, 1992). The findings of Stiefel and others (1998, 2000) showed benefits of small schools such as higher graduation rates and lower dropout rates. Small schools produced among the lowest costs per graduate.

Of the 18 small schools studied, 15 had enrollments within the ranges (300 to 400 for elementary and 400 to 800 for secondary small schools) established by Williams (1990). The other schools had enrollments just above the high point of the range, although still considered to be small by the administrator and the community. Enrollment increases tended to be mitigated as most small schools were in small well-established

towns where the remaining buildable land was used for farming, was preserved, or was under pinelands restrictions.

The average class size of nearly every small school was below the state average. Those schools whose class-size average was higher than the state average were schools with the largest school enrollments of all the school districts studied. Generally as the school enrollment figures increased, the average class size did as well.

Administrative costs per pupil in this study were above the New Jersey state average especially in schools with the fewest students. As the Business Administrator described, there simply are fewer students to divide the costs among and many Administrators contended that their small student enrollment skewed the administrative cost data. High administrative costs have shed a negative light on small schools. McKenzie (cited in Cotton, 1996) argued that many analyses of school size-cost relationships are simplistic in nature and do not yield useful information on the efficiency of small schools. Administrators and Board of Education Members discussed how efforts to share services for superintendent and business administrator services with neighboring districts were extremely helpful in lowering administrative costs. In two small school districts, the salary for a business administrator was half and as little as a third of what the district would have needed to pay for these services.

Coupled with the higher administrative costs per pupil were the state aid figures that revealed the majority of the small schools required local taxpayers to cover school costs for two-thirds or more of their local tax bill. Districts with a lower SES were more likely to receive greater amounts of state aid than were higher SES districts.

Findings of academic achievement of students in small schools were consistent with the literature. They were equal in some measures (Fowler, 1995; Gregory, 1992; C. Howley, 1996) and superior in others (Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Walberg, 1992) using the Grade 4ESPA, NJASK4, the Grade 8 GEPA, and Grade 11 HSPA data for 2000-2003. The percentages of fourth-grade students performing at the lowest level (Partial Proficient) in language arts and math on the 2000-2001 ESPA were lower than the state and their respective DFG averages. The DFG schools had higher average scores in the highest scoring category (Advanced Proficient) as compared with the percentages in small schools, but this was often based on a student or two because of small student enrollments in small schools.

At the eighth-grade level, small school students' performance on the 2001-2002 GEPA outscored their peers as compared with the NJ State average and DFG percentages in language arts and mathematics. Superior scores were identified in both subject areas of District B that outperformed the NJ State average and the DFG schools. Partial Proficient levels of students in language arts were as low as 3.1% in Language Arts and Advanced Proficient levels were as high as 64.6% in mathematics on the 2002-2003 GEPA. Again, small student enrollments in small schools must be considered.

High school students in small schools outperformed their peers as compared to the NJ State average on the 2001-2002 HSPA. These students performed considerably better on the 2002-2003 HSPA in both language arts and mathematics as compared with the NJ State average and their DFG counter parts. The success of these high school students was also measured by the percentage of graduates above the NJ State average of 89.4% by almost 4% in District Q for 2002-2003. The overall dropout rates for the two

high schools were lower than the NJ State average, which was consistent to Pittman and Haughwout (1987), who found that an increase in dropout rates corresponded to an increase in school size.

Respondents in this study shared that there was a sense of what Meier (1996) called “belonging to a community”(p.14). In addition to their being the highest authority figure in the district, the superintendents or chief school administrators had the benefits of being able to keep their finger on the pulse of their school and the students. The researcher had the opportunity to tour eight schools with the participants who were Superintendents or Chief School Administrators of their schools. The interaction between the administrator and students was genuine. Administrators knew the names of every child we encountered in the hallways during our walk-through in the schools and could relay history about the child and perhaps his or her siblings and even their parents who may have attended the school. These interactions were consistent with what Sarason (1974) described as the “psychological sense of community” or PSOC (cited in McMillan & Chavis, 1986) that small schools are able to provide.

Additional benefits of small schools were characterized in the climate of the school and the level of communication. The climate addressed students’ sense of belonging as well as the teachers and administrators having a pride in their work in a small school. Bryk and Driscoll’s (1998) findings that students felt connected socially to their school were echoed in the administrators’ comments that their schools were one big family. The opportunities for communication with students, parents, administrators, and other teachers before and after school occurred more often in small schools as compared to large schools due in part to the dynamics of the small school. Parents walked with

their children to school in some of the small schools and the smaller numbers of students added to the simplicity that Meier (1996) depicted as less bureaucracy that makes school easier to individualize. Informal meetings took place as parents picked up their students each day or at small gatherings on the sidewalks out front of the school each morning. Individualized attention was also demonstrated in special needs students being identified in the early months of the school year as well as earlier in their school career.

Students' participation in extracurricular activities was found to be an important aspect of building community and having students in small schools feel successful beyond the academics. Students tended to participate in a number of activities based on the availability of them as well as access. In a small school all students who went out for a team often had chances to participate as there was no need to "cut" anyone. Cotton (1996) found that this type of participation in extracurricular activities was the single best-supported finding in the school-size research, and because the research identified important relationships between extracurricular participation and other desirable outcomes including positive attitudes and social behavior, this finding was especially significant.

The findings about attendance rates, student achievement, and dropout rates were in line with the research at the Bank Street College of Education (2000). The Bank Street study found that the relationship between school size and student achievement suggested that students' levels of attachment, persistence, and performance were stronger in small schools than in larger schools.

Research question two dealt with the benefits small schools provided to their communities. Researchers studying small schools often described them as the hub of the

community providing a major resource to the town (Nachtigal, 1994). The presence of a school for even the smallest of rural communities afforded residents higher housing values and other municipal services (Lyson, 2002).

The participants in the present study noted that communities benefited by having small schools within them by serving as the hub of the community for events for students as well as families and other community members. Community relations were heightened by the events hosted by the schools and the outreach provided by the teachers and administrators in the small schools. The participants shared that people in the community cited their decision to buy a home in the community was due in part to the small school. In turn, there was a level of retention for families to stay within the community.

An added benefit of nearly half of the small schools in this study was the lack of a need for busing students. Administrators cited the numerous opportunities to communicate with families who walked their children to school. Unlike an Assistant Principal who lamented over the time and energy to deal with behavioral issues on buses, small school administrators who did have busing (except for Special Education students) commented that their time dealing with bus issues was minimal or non-existent.

Research question three addressed the challenges small schools face in maintaining fiscal viability (Lawrence, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1995) and competitive curricula (Pittman & Haughwout, 1987). The participants in this study cited that the main challenges financially were with the limited resources, administrative costs, and budgetary constraints. The limited resources were in the form of shared staff for special area subjects such as foreign languages, art, and music due to the schools' minimal needs

in these areas. They articulated the creative solutions they were able to arrange with neighboring districts to share the cost of these teachers while providing a full-time salary for the employees.

Building-level as well as School Board participants spoke about the challenges of dealing with penalties for administrative costs that loomed over them every year. A Superintendent relayed the concern of many of the participants in that there are just fewer students to divide the costs among and therefore it was a difficult task to translate to the community why these costs were higher than in larger districts. With significantly smaller budgets as compared with larger districts, small-school Administrators and Business Administrators explained how tight they needed to keep their budgets. A School Board President explained it as, "Such a small percentage of the district's budget is really discretionary or put toward things other than the core curriculum areas. I mean so much is tied up in insurance, salaries, and other things. The Board really doesn't have a lot of say as to where the money goes. It is really dictated by the state". The 2004 mandate by the state was NJ Legislative Bill S-1701, which caused the participants to have serious concerns about their school's financial futures.

The participants viewed the Bill S-1701 as a penalty for having been fiscally prudent by maintaining a surplus for the unanticipated costs and outlays such as capital improvements or special needs students. However, they would no longer have this same amount of funds to draw from in the event of an emergency due to the requirements of S-1701. Their concern was that the smaller percentages of an already small budget would leave all districts, not just small ones, with limited funds and schools would not have the necessary funds in reserve for emergencies.

As a more accurate measure of efficiency, it was recommended that small schools and small districts examine and report out their cost per students who graduate.

Researchers concluded that the cost per student graduated offered a resounding validation for small schools. That is, by examining another measure of economy of scale, the graduation rate and the “cost per student graduated”, small schools with a much higher graduation rate were found to be the most economical of all (Stiefel, Berne, Iatarola, & Fruchter, 2000). Beyond costs, the other argument leveled against small schools has been their inferior curricula as compared to those of large schools.

The challenges to providing competitive curricula at the elementary level were to a minor degree in scheduling and in the limited number of staff members with whom to work at each of the respective grade levels and content areas. Since many of the districts had one or two teachers per grade level, some administrators expressed the need for their teachers to have a larger network of colleagues to share and articulate with for each of the respective grade levels. Similarly, a content-area teacher at the middle grades may have been the only person teaching the subject or at best, had one other colleague to share ideas within the building.

An administrator’s concern with having half-time teachers was noted as a challenge for scheduling; however, the research did not support that teachers who shared their time between multiple buildings would necessarily have mixed loyalties as a result of not being in just one building, as what could be surmised. The present research did support what Klonsky (cited in Starr, 1999) referred to as morale, where greater teacher empowerment elicits more school affiliation, more effort and stronger commitment to the school and to the students.

The challenge of providing competitive curricula was greater at the high school level than at the elementary level. The Board of Education President and Auditor shared that core high school courses were in place as in larger high schools. In small schools, there were often fewer choices in elective courses than in larger schools. Although these participants viewed the lack of variety as a negative as compared with the regional high school in the next town, the research revealed that there was no reliable relationship between school size and curriculum quality (Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Monk & Haller, 1986; Pittman & Haughwout, 1987).

When asked about the challenges of providing competitive curricula, seven of the participants took the opportunity to share not the challenges, but the advantages small schools had in developing curricula. Among their advantages, teachers were empowered, there was less red tape in the decision-making process due to less bureaucracy, and the time frame for change was comparatively shorter in small schools as compared to larger schools. These advantages were depicted in what Klonsky (cited in Starr, 1999) referred to as governance where small schools require less red tape, establish fewer rules and allow greater flexibility. Consequently, small schools were able to innovate and to make changes more readily than their larger school counterparts.

Research question four referenced the organization practices and strategies to contain costs and to provide competitive curricula (Bryk & Driscoll, 1998; Dewees, 1999; Monk & Haller, 1986; Wasley et al., 2000). When participants were asked about the organizational practices to contain costs, nine key practices emerged from the responses that reflected similar educational cooperatives outlined in the research (Hughes et al., 1971).

Participants cited educational consortia as the most widely used practice for containing costs. These educational consortia were what Hughes and others (1971) referred to as voluntary education cooperatives. The consortia provided discount purchasing of goods, services, and energy requirements. Another means of containing costs was shared-services. Small school districts entered into agreements with neighboring districts to share the administrative services of the superintendent and business administrator. Other services that were shared were among teaching staff especially in specialty area, Special Services personnel, and custodial personnel. Administrators and a Board of Education President shared that the relationships with other districts required effort much like any other interpersonal relationship; however, there were the added benefits of experience and expertise of the other district that the small school was able to tap into, for example, with the superintendent and business administrator positions. Eight of the districts in the study entered into shared-services agreements with neighboring districts for such services as superintendent, business administrator, and special services. Rather than having to pay a full salary and benefits for the position, the small district could buy the services and expertise provided by the person in the neighboring district. The School Board President shared that the initial shared-services agreement branched into other services that the small school district eventually entered into that provided even greater savings for the district.

Participants described cost-saving initiatives in the form of creating education foundations, the development of Special Education programs in-house, containing non-teaching positions, and writing grants. Building administrators highlighted the many educational opportunities that would have been lost without the financial assistance of the

educational foundation funds afforded to their schools. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has an endowment of approximately \$24 billion for instructional strategies and curriculum content. Special Education programs such as a pre-school handicap class were started in small schools that saved costs in sending students out of district and when available; openings were offered to neighboring schools on a tuition basis. Non-teaching staff positions were put on a priority list according to what districts could afford. Participants shared that materials for interdisciplinary units of study and field trips were possible through grants they had received from corporate sponsors such as Dow Chemical and Exxon, the state of New Jersey (REAP), and the federal government.

Strategies that worked toward saving costs and providing competitive curricula were organizing multi-age classrooms and inter-district collaboration. Two small schools combined classrooms in a multi-age arrangement. The educational and emotional needs of students were met while providing a cost-saving measure for the school. The level of personalization was built into this scheduling model. Where larger districts had specialized personnel to coordinate and revise curricula, small schools relied upon personnel working between many small districts to make curriculum revisions. This form of inter-district curriculum planning provided networking opportunities as well as preparation for elementary sending districts to articulate similar expectations for all students entering the same high school through cluster meetings of teachers from each of the elementary schools.

Research question five addressed how small schools organize utilizing the element of economy of scale (Andrews et al., 1995; Association, 1994; B. Barker, 1986; Gregory, 2000; C. Howley, 1996; Hughes et al., 1971; Molnar et al., 2000; Sergiovanni,

1995; Walberg, 1992). In this study, the participants shared that their school districts participated in consortia as stated earlier in the findings as a means of curbing costs through economy of scale. Additionally, a Chief School Administrator suggested maximizing the efforts of school leaders by pulling their efforts to complete their district reports into a single report for sending districts of a regional high school or at the county level.

Several participants stated that although economy of scale would have the community believe that the industrial model offered by Frederick Taylor would lend itself to the education realm, what would be gained financially would be lost in the personal costs to young people. The economy of scale mindset would have small schools regionalize or consolidate into one bigger school as a cost-saving measure, while small school administrators described how cooperation with other schools and organizations have resulted in greater cost savings for small schools. A School Board President shared that having been part of the finance committee for the board, the board members worked with the figures when they considered consolidating and relayed that, "There is no guarantee that our taxes would go down. In fact, the numbers that we ran showed that they would go up because if you look at the average cost of the house in our town and the average cost in the next town over, they are paying more in taxes than we are. From a school standpoint, we certainly wouldn't see a tax decrease by sending our children elsewhere". His example was in agreement with Lee and Smith (1994) who found that the savings projected by proponents of school consolidation have not materialized. Rather, the notion of economies of scale translated into diseconomies or penalties of scale. Large schools as it turns out need more layers of support and administrative staff

to handle the increased bureaucratic demands. The Assistant Principal of a large elementary school explained his concern this way: “There is a human cost that is not worth the economy of scale it provides.”

Recommendations for Policy

The following policy recommendations for the federal, state, and local levels are based on the examination of the results of this study, and of the accumulating body of research on small schools and districts.

Federal Policy Recommendations

1. There needs to be consideration for small school class sizes as being disproportionate to larger schools when annual yearly progress is calculated for No Child Left Behind requirements.

State Policy Recommendations

1. State legislators seeking ways of measuring costs for running schools should look to using the cost per graduate as a measure of efficiency versus administrative cost per pupil.
2. Regionalization feasibility studies need to incorporate factors such as an estimate of class size, costs for busing, and times for busing routes into the alternatives when making recommendations.
3. States need to monitor the allocation of funds for the Interdistrict School Choice Program closely to ensure double funding is not being disbursed to the Interdistrict Choice School and to the district in which the students reside.

4. Offer the Interdistrict School Choice Program to more small school districts as a means for providing additional tuition benefits and resources to the host school.
5. The state could provide a list of potential cost saving practices and strategies available to schools and provide incentives to districts where the district leaders have participated.

Public School Policy Recommendations

1. Administrators and Boards of Education of small schools need to promote greater public and community awareness of the programs, services, and the overall environment their small schools provide for students.
2. Discussions and decisions on the future of a small school need to be carefully brought to all constituencies of the community to be considered before final decisions are put to the voters. Some community members may be reluctant to be part of the public forum or to come to a public meeting to voice their points of view publicly.
3. Small districts need to form clusters of districts to provide articulation time between grade levels and content areas. Articulation time would be scheduled during the county or districts' professional development days.

Local Small School and/or District Exemplary Practice

1. Report or communicate school "costs" compared to state averages for graduation rates, reduced student discipline, and school/district damage costs.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the findings and conclusions of this research, additional areas of study are recommended:

1. The findings of this study were limited to 21 participants, including central office employees, building administration, and school board members, from small school districts across the state of New Jersey and were included in focus group and one-on-one interviews. It is recommended that interviews be conducted with similar participants in other states to determine what are the similarities and differences of responses in how administrators and district leaders contained costs and maintained competitive curricula.
2. Research of the same nature could be conducted comparing the organizational practices to contain costs and provide competitive curricula between large and small schools within the same DFG groupings in the state of New Jersey.
3. Research could examine the financial and educational impact of Legislative Bill S-1701/A99 on small schools in New Jersey over several years.
4. Research could investigate the impact that the consolidation and regionalization efforts have had on saving taxpayers money in districts that have merged with other districts. Researchers could attempt to determine the impact the closing or consolidation of small schools or small school districts in New Jersey has had on the small communities in which the schools/districts were located.
5. Research could examine the success of students in who complete grades 9-12 in large schools who were in small schools during their earlier education, such as in grades K

through 8. A similar examination could follow the success rate of these students in secondary education environments.

Some Concluding Remarks

Small schools have played an integral role in providing an environment “that is about children, not politics and all that, but the children” according to one participant in this study. Smaller is better and the research supports this assertion (Cotton, 1996). The words of a Superintendent capture what it is that communities, educators, and policy makers need to do for their small schools to continue not only to survive, but also to thrive. He explained:

I really feel that small is better and there has to be a way in order to find a common ground. I’ve worked in large districts. I’ve worked in urban districts. I’ve worked in small districts. I think small districts really make a big difference in all kids’ lives, not just the kids who are at the top and not just the kids who are at the bottom, but also the kids in the middle who seem to profit a great deal. So in summary, I think that there has got to be a way to have both and be able to survive.

Researchers have contended that what is missing in most cost studies is any analysis of other indirect costs or social costs of large schools or school districts in terms of the communities. Large-school consolidations have robbed many local communities of one of their key resources, while large impersonal learning environments cost more in a non-traditional sense (Nachtigal, 1994) as well as other costly social problems. Before the state legislates the demise of small schools, the true academic as well as cost benefits

of these small, intimate learning environments needs to be made loud and clear to the educational, political, and policy making powers that be.

Breaking News

The topic of small schools addressed in this study continues to be a “hot button issue” in education. The entire issue of the American Association of School Administrators magazine was devoted to several of the key points identified in this study, i.e. shared services, shared dual superintendency, and consolidation (AASA, 2006). As presented in the review of the literature and in the findings and conclusions to this study, the authors noted the glaring contradictions inherent in consolidation at the very time when small schools are being featured, for example, Gates Foundation, HS redesigning.

Russo noted that there was no consensus on consolidation and questioned the oddity of “savings” only on schools (kids) when a broader picture is needed to examine the scope of finances with issues like regional policing, ambulances, etc. (2006). How about the push for improving high school graduation rates in the U.S.? The answers to alleviating the reported concern for the high school drop-rate are rooted in the data that clearly show higher graduation rates and safety in small schools. Even the federal NCLB requirements to report persistently violent schools bear out the successful record of small schools.

This study on small schools is particularly relevant in the current education landscape where the states of Maine, Illinois, and Iowa are looking at the issue of consolidation of their schools. These states would follow in the footsteps of Arizona, Arkansas, California, Montana, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Virginia that since 2000

have enacted policies related to district consolidation according to the National Conference of State Legislatures (Russo, 2006, p.11). Strange, policy director for the Rural School and Community Trust noted that, “District consolidations always starts out being about eliminating expensive superintendents, but it’s also about clearing way the political infrastructure that supports small schools.” Strange continued, “When you close districts, you come back later and close schools—no matter what they are saying now.” (As cited by Russo, 2006, p.11).

This study reinforces many other comprehensive studies recognizing the virtues and successes of small schools. It is time that legislators and policy makers are called to action to address these contradictions and to seek data driven solutions toward improving our schools.

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APPENDIX A

12 Maple Street
Lebanon, New Jersey 08833
April , 2004
H: 908-236-7829
W: 609-466-7601 x7232
Fax: 908-236-7829
cburton@mtsd.k12.nj.us

Dear.....,

The latest research and education literature have documented the overwhelming benefits of small schools over their larger school counterparts on a number of measures and equal on others. Raywid (1999) asserted that the superiority of small schools has been "established with a clarity and at a level of confidence rare in the annals of education research".

Beyond their educational function, small schools serve as a focal point for community life. The research on small schools points to the benefits on a number of fronts, yet small schools continue to function under financial constraints and with the fear of being recommended to close. To offer these schools viable financial and organizational solutions, it is important to look to those effective small schools to ascertain how they have been able to excel at the virtues of a small school.

As an educator, I am always attempting to find ways to improve the education for all students. Currently, I am a district curriculum director of mathematics in Montgomery Township. I am also the proud parent of two girls who attend the Lebanon Borough Elementary School, a small school in Hunterdon County. During my studies at Seton Hall University, I became interested in small schools and decided to pursue my doctoral research on this topic. As part of the requirements of the doctoral degree and dissertation at Seton Hall University, I want to conduct focus group interviews with superintendents, business administrators, principals at the elementary, middle, and high school level; later, confidential interviews will be conducted with building and district level administrators.

From this study, I hope to gain an understanding of the organizational strategies used by administrators in overcoming community-based struggles of cost containment and maintenance of fiscal viability while providing a quality education for all students in small schools.

Information gathered from this study will be entirely confidential. Interviews will be audiotaped and anonymous. I will be the only person who has access to pre-coded identifying numbers assigned to these tapes. When the focus groups have been transcribed and analyzed, these tapes will be destroyed.

This project will have been reviewed and approved by the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research. The IRB believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject's privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The Chairperson of the IRB may be reached at (973) 275-2977 or 313-6314.

My sincere hope is that you will assist me. I should take approximately one hours of your time. If I do not hear from you within one week, I will contact you by telephone to discuss this with you. If you are in agreement with this, I would appreciate your confirmation of permission to conduct this study. I look forward to hearing from you and would like to thank you in advance for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Christine Burton

Interview Appointment
Time _____
Date _____
Location _____

Actual contact date _____
Date contact summary completed _____

APPENDIX B

Contact Summary Form

Small Schools: How School Districts Can Organize to Afford Them

Participant's name: _____
 School: _____
 Address: _____
 Phone number: _____
 Email address: _____

1. What were the main issues or themes related to this contact?

2. What methodological notes are required?

3. Summarize the information collected (or failed to collect) on each of the target questions
 - a. Benefits of small schools for students
 - b. Benefits of small schools on the community
 - c. Challenges for small schools-fiscally
 - d. Challenges for small schools-curricular
 - e. Organizational strategies – containing costs
 - f. Organizational strategies – curricular quality
 - g. Organizational strategies – economy of scale
 - h. Other

4. Anything else that was salient, interesting, illuminating or important in this contact?

5. What new target questions result from this contact?

APPENDIX C

Question 1

For the purpose of getting to know more about the background of the schools in which each of you work would you do the following:

- a. State your name and title.*
- b. Number of years in education.*
- c. Time in district.*
- d. Grade level of school(s)/ approximate number of total students.*
- e. Years you have worked in a small school district.*

Respondent #1:

A auditor of various school districts ranging from very, very small to a quite large as an auditor for these. My own practice for the last 21 years and prior to that with other accounting firms and basically been auditing school districts for approximately 30 years.

Respondent #2:

Well my name is Respondent #2 and here in smaller districts we are called chief school administrators because we do both roles principal and superintendent. This will be, I will be going into my 20th year in education. I've been here this will be going into my fourth year here and we have one school. Now we are back to Pre K to 8 and we're going to have approximately 380 students in the fall. In a small school district for probably five years total in a small district between my previous district and here. My previous district is really not that small, but it is smaller and it is still a one-school district.

Respondent #3:

My name is Respondent #3 and I'm the Chief School Administrator for the school district, which means that translates into that I am the Superintendent and the Principal in the building. I have twenty-nine years of experience, twenty-seven in this district. I spent ten years as a teacher, fourteen years as a Vice Principal and three years as the Chief School Administrator. The grade levels of the school are K through 8. When I started in 1978, we had 250 children and today in the same building with several additions, we have 606 children. My whole public school has been in this district and I did two years in a small parochial school. I did my student teaching in a large high school so I have a perspective on that.

Respondent #4:

My name is Respondent #4 and I am the Assistant Superintendent for this consortium. Oh, I started in education in '72 so that would give me about 32 years.

Respondent #5:

Respondent #5, Principal of the school and I've have 27 yrs. in education. I am going into my second year. Grade levels are K through 8 and 87 students.

Respondent #6:

Respondent #6. My title is the Director. 43 in the public schools and 50 years as a college adjunct.

Respondent #7:

Ok, my name is Respondent #7 and I am the interim superintendent of schools and I've been here for one month. And I have thirty-eight years of experience in the field of education and the school district has grade levels that span from kindergarten to eighth grade. And we sent our high school students to regional high school. We have approximately 750 kids that are K through 8. As far as working in small districts, I have worked in a district that had 1,800 children for five years. I worked in a district that had 1,400 children for five years. I worked in a small school for six months and now I am now with a district of 750. The small district by the way has less than 100 students.

Respondent #8:

My name is Respondent #8. I am the superintendent. I've been 30 years in education. This is my fifth year here. We're a K to 8 district. Almost 500 students. I've been in small school districts for probably 15 to 20 years.

Respondent #9:

Respondent #9, Chief School Administrator. I have been in education for twenty years. I have been in my district for two and a half years. The grade levels are kindergarten through sixth grade and approximately sixty give or take five and the small school district, depending on what you mean by small but I'm assuming under 500, so it would be two and a half years. All my other experience has been with bigger, bigger districts. Um, that is it for that.

Respondent #10:

Respondent #10, Superintendent of schools of a small public school. Twenty-five years in public education 180 students in the K-6. Years I have worked in a small district; I have worked in two different small districts. The four years at my current school and I also spent four and a half years in a public. Four years in my school district. The grade level is currently K-6 and the approximately c school in another county in New Jersey. So all those years were in New Jersey.

Respondent #11:

Hello, my name is Respondent #11. My title is superintendent and principal at my school district. I have been in education for 27 ½ years. I have been in my school district for one and a half years. We are a K-6 school. We also have a pre-school handicap program. We are up to about 240 children right now and I have worked in a small school district for a year and a half after working in many large school districts. So it gives me a nice perspective. I think it may help you with the study too.

Respondent #12:

My name is Respondent #12. I am the Superintendent and Principal of our school. I have been here for two and a half years. I have twenty-eight years in education. Twenty of which have been as an administrator and principal. The grade levels of our current school setting here are pre-school ages 3 through eighth grade and we have approximately 230 to 240 students. I have

worked in a small school two and a half years here and I spent three years in a small junior-senior high school in another county back in the '80's. I have five and a half years in a small school. The rest of my time I would indicate would be probably mid-size to large school districts.

Respondent #13:

My name is Respondent #13 and I am the Business Administrator for our school. I'm in my sixth year in education. Always wanted to be a teacher and became a Business Administrator. I have thirty years in the corporate world and have spent a little over four years in another school district and now on my second year here at this school and this is my first small district. My other district was a fairly large district with about 1,000 students and a number of schools. So I was in a fairly centralized central office. Here it is much more hands-on type thing in a small school and a small district.

Respondent #14:

Respondent #14, Chief School Administrator. In education itself, this is my forty-first year. Ten years in this district. K-8 and we're down to 117 children. Well, there is a notion, which was a small school and according to the state department, small schools are 500 and under. So, in my service at a neighboring district where I was principal for 8 years, that was 500 children. In a prior district where I was superintendent for 8 years that was 500 children. So, eight and eight is 16 and ten is 26 years in small schools. So my math skills are pretty good.

Respondent #15:

Respondent #15, the president of our school board. I have been on the board for 6 1/2 years. In our school we have K through 6 and we are a sending district for our seventh and eighth graders and the high school kids go to the regional high school. So our board is responsible for the K through 6. K through 6 varies from year to year, but approximately 92 would be an average.

CB: HOW MANY DO YOU SEND IN SEVENTH AND EIGHTH?

Respondent #15: Seventh and eighth is anywhere from 20 to 25.

CB: SO THOSE 25 STUDENTS AREN'T INCLUDED AS PART OF YOUR SCHOOL?

Respondent #15:

Yes, they are being sent and we're charged for each of those students that go over there, but we don't have any responsibility of overseeing their education directly other than the financial responsibility for dispersing the taxes to the receiving district.

Respondent #16:

Sure, my name is Respondent #16. I'm the chief school administrator of my school district and have a number of years in education more than I care to remember, but probably about 35. Here, this is my ninth year in this school and we house children from Pre-K through 8. The years I've worked in a small district? Well, before this I was a principal in a very large district, but our school was only 240 kids, but it was a large district and prior to that I was a high school principal in an area where there were a lot of kids. So, this is my first time in a small school setting.

Respondent #17:

My name is Respondent #17 and my title right now is retired however I spent about 33 years in as an educator and started out as a middle school mathematics teacher. I was a middle school mathematics and English teacher at one point. I became a middle school guidance counselor. I moved into some administrative work relative to the guidance office and then became a principal in an elementary school. At the end of my career for four years and this school was a small school with our district and it was a K through 3 school and it at one point we had about 200 children. So it was the smallest of three elementary in the district. The middle school was obviously a lot larger and right now the configuration of that district is that it has three K through 3 schools; two of them small and one of them quite large. It is way over 500 students right now. There is a four-five school that consolidates them all; you know takes from all three. There is a middle school six, seven and eight and then our high school. We were pressured and I'm talking about the borough now. There was a township school system and a borough school system originally and in 1988 we regionalized the entire school district K through 12 the borough and the township. At that time it's my impression if my memory is correct that we were the first district in the state of New Jersey to regionalize K through 12. Apparently there had been a lot of regionalization obviously with high schools, but we were the first ones to really regionalize you know the elementary schools also. So, in addition to that I have done an interim principalship for nine months in a small rural school in neighboring county.

Respondent #18:

I am the Chief School Administrator for the school district. I have been in education for 30 years. I have been here since July 1st of this year so that is just a little over two months. Uh, the grade level of our school is a K to 8 district and we have approximately 280 students. I have worked in the small school district just for the last two and a half months. Prior to that I was in a relatively small school district. It was, I want to say 700 or 800 students for a year and prior to that I was in a large urban Abbott district so I have seen the gamut.

CB: SO YOU HAVE A BASIS OF COMPARISON?

Respondent #18:

Right.

Respondent #19:

I'm Respondent #19 currently the assistant principal of this school. This is my 24th year of education. This is my fourth year in this school. This is a school of K through 2 and fifth grade children with about 400 per grade level for a total of 1,550 children. Well, my children attended very small schools, neighborhood schools so 12 years and I taught actually my first year in a 7 through 12 school that was very small.

Respondent #20:

Sure, my name is Respondent #20. I'm the Chief School Administrator/Principal/Acting Child Study Team in my school. I have been in education since 1978 as a matter of fact is when I graduated. So you've got 20 plus, but I had three years maternity so I don't know if you need to factor that into anything or not. This is the beginning of my fourth year and I am on my second

contract though. The first contract was for three years. The board rescinded that that year and reissued a five-year contract. So that was very nice. That's a sign to me. The exact number of students is 310. We have a pre-school disabilities class and then kindergarten a.m. and p.m. and we go through then first through eighth grade after pre-school disabilities and kindergarten. We have two of every grade level.

Respondent #21:

My name is Respondent #21 and I was a school board president, member and president for District Q High School from 1980 to 2000 so for 20 years. The school is a regional high school with grades 7 through 12 and they have three feeder elementary schools. The school hasn't grown very much. I haven't been back there and I haven't kept in touch, but the building doesn't look much different than it looked when it opened in the early 60's.

Question 2

The term small school can mean different things to different people. How would you describe the term small school?

Respondent #1:

Small schools are basically, uh schools of one or two buildings; uh maybe to a total of usually K to 8 districts approximately 400 to 800 students as far as a small school is concerned. Uh, schools larger than that have the benefits of larger budgets.

Respondent #2:

Well, I think population wise; I think you are right on target. If you go on the state web page and you look at how they break the districts up, I think its 300 or less, 500 or less. I think a school district anywhere from 300 to 400 all inclusive K to 8 or Pre K to 8 really constitutes a small school. I think when you talk about community schools; one school building is a small school. I mentioned a southern district. They have one building K to 8; we have one building K to 8. Those are smaller schools. When you get up around over 1,100 like a District R and then you have more than one school, you really aren't a small school district anymore. And according to the Department of Ed at least what you read, about 55% of the districts in the state of New Jersey are considered small and rural. So the composition is different. I just think that it is more the one building, the one community kind of school district.

Respondent #3:

I would describe a small elementary school as one that runs K through 8 rather than being segmented K-2, 3-5, and 6-8. Large middle schools, I find are all the hormones are raging at the same time and it doesn't make it conducive for a smooth educational process. In a K through 8 building, the sixth, seventh, and eighth graders become the leaders of the building and so they demonstrate a more mature attitude and their behavior is much improved and they're more focused because they are the examples for the lower grade children and that is the way we treat them.

Respondent #4:

My estimation and I think the Department of Education I too also have also worked for the Department of Education. I started my career as an elementary teacher in an urban district Board of Education in '72 and worked in the district through '89 and accepted a position in '89. Having worked in there for thirteen years, I worked my way up until I worked at the county level. I had the opportunity was afforded me to come and actually work in a small school district and kind of put to practice what I had been preaching from working for the DOE and it was a good career move because I had an opportunity really to see the operations and I would consider this to be a small school. Our enrollment of students is on the four campuses we only have about 300 students. So we are small in nature. I think the Department of Education considers a small school a school that is a one building school building. That I think is pretty much the definition that they have and in my work here at the Commission, we had a situation back in 2003 that the president of the District C Board of Education, he came to my Superintendent and because they are a member of our Representative Assembly, he explained that they needed some assistance. They had a building principal that they thought had chief school administrator's credentials and they found out that the gentleman did not and by law you have to have someone holding that credential. So the board president asked the Superintendent and myself if we could provide Chief School Administrative services for the year 2003 to 2004. We kind of reluctantly agreed because we do have so many things on our plate at the time, but we felt an obligation because the school is a member of our consortia. That is what our charter has really directed us to do is to provide services for our member districts.

Respondent #5:

One, that the principal wears many hats. Curriculum supervises; he handles that; testing and really a lot of the assistant superintendent pieces, grants. Um, you know, that would be my understanding of small school.

Respondent #6:

Well I would probably say under 450 if you mean numerically small. Well, I guess if you want to get away from numbers, you would talk about the organization and you know the clustering and the community those kinds of soft signs of intimate and small and productive and supportive and so forth. Most people think of small in terms of numbers.

Respondent #7:

Well, in the state of New Jersey we have many districts that are small. I would say any district that has 2,000 or less, but if you were to go Florida they may categorize a small district as a district that has 5,000 or less. So it depends on what state you go into, but in the state of New Jersey, we have a good deal of students that in the small category. In my definition probably in this state would be anything that is under 2,000 students.

Respondent #8:

Well I don't know if small school is the right term. Maybe small district would be a better term and in New Jersey the interpretation of that is different because of the configuration whether it is a K to 12 district, K to 8, K to 6. A lot of people term a small school district as a small K to 6 district. In our county, we're probably more of an average size district as a K to 8 district and

there are only three regional high schools here. So I guess to Cherry Hill or Newark, we are a small school district compared to some districts in this county we're actually middle size.

Respondent #9:

One building, one administrator, maybe one administrator with an assistant, but typically small enough to where you know everything is going on. Um, so to me around 500 or less, but to me you could have around 550 and still be considered small. I know over at a neighboring district, they're closer to 600. I would consider them to be small. Um, it is kind of one single building, one central administrator or maybe two if it is a district and a school. So sometimes in a school/district you'll have a principal and a chief school administrator, but basically that is my definition. I think you also have to take into consideration the age range. For example, another district, which is larger has K-8, where as we have K-6. So, if you have a K-12 for example, I think you can be larger and still be a small school because of the range of the kids. So another consideration is how many students per grade level you would be looking at.

Respondent #10:

I think from a global perspective, I think New Jersey has one hundred and some odd one school district districts and that could be anywhere from a functioning K-6 elementary, K-8 elementary and regional high school systems from 9 through 12 to 7 through 12. So from a global perspective, that is easy to define. I think we have to talk about certainly the number of students. I think 100 through 500 is what is being defined as a small school. I too think that it can go up to 700 and the more important piece is it is a one school-operating district. I know of several in New Jersey that still have two schools, two elementary schools, and are still under 500. I would define that as a small school district as well as long as both those schools are under 500 as well. So that is a unique situation. I think there is one of those types of school districts in another county I believe. Now some of them have two schools, but the total enrollment is still low. In terms of the term small school is definitely being overplayed out politically now and it is trying to be teamed up with saying it is not efficient and it is not efficient because of administrative costs and those types of things. But I think a true small school is defined as a one school district with 500 or less students. You could also look at staff. You know how many staff members, which I haven't seen a lot of. Everyone is talking about students, but I think you could define it as the amount of staff members also. You know 75 or less staff members. And I too agree that one superintendent, one business administrator, is your administration. That seems to define a lot of the school districts and sometimes a principal or chief school administrator/principal.

Respondent #11:

How would I describe the term small school? I would describe the term as a place where each child is vitally important. We build our schools around our children. We provide small group instruction and individualized instruction that a large school can't provide. We provide a warm, caring, supportive environment that a lot of large school can't provide. A small school allows you to have goals and objectives for the school and for each child in the school. A small school allows you to deliver a guaranteed and viable curriculum that a large school may or may not be able to do. At least you have a much better handle on that. So those are the kinds of things that a small school means to me.

Respondent #12:

I think a small school is a setting where there is an intimate environment between the community and the school system and particularly between the students and the faculty. That could be any size, but traditionally I think of a small school in the 400 range and lower. Certainly we would be in that range. Those intimate opportunities arise because there's a low student-teacher population ratio and I think that benefits the children. It benefits the community and it benefits the teachers in terms of them providing a quality education.

Respondent #13:

I would be the same as #12.

Respondent #14:

I think the key concept is that it is small family like that you get to know people extremely well. You get to know their strengths and their weaknesses. You are able to make those compensations that make for a good working relationship with people when you know what their strong suit is and when you are able to compensate for some of their weaknesses.

Respondent #15:

A small school to me is any district that is in and of itself a single building, a single school without multiple locations. It doesn't necessarily mean no busing. We're fortunate that we don't have to bus. Our school is that small. Our community is that small, but there are small schools that do provide busing as well.

Respondent #16:

The term small school means different things, well how would you describe the term. Well, there are variations on a small school theme, but one that you can reach out to kids and know the children individually would be my description of a small school. You are intimately knowledgeable of them, what they do; how they live so that you can better serve them educationally. So that is my definition of a small school.

Respondent #17:

I think small school in my experience, which is sort of limited to just these two districts, but you know it is a relative term. You know, small in relationship to what? In relationship to the other schools in the district? Or small because of the population? Uh, I think in my experience in District N, we had a small school probably objectively speaking, but also in relationship to the other two schools especially the one and in District D that is a small school because the population is very small, but not, you know, there is nothing relative about that except to compare it to other communities.

Respondent #18:

Um, well I guess it could be small, I would consider it small in enrollment, but I think you could also have a small school within a large school. I'll just go back a little even though; I was in a larger urban district. There were a lot of little academies there that they had started as part of the high school so these large comprehensive high schools became; they were still there, but they

had a technology academy. They had a health academy. They had a fine arts academy and these became little small high schools let's say of 200 students and the culture definitely changed once those became small schools. So you could have a small school, in my opinion, within a large school, but a small school, to me, is a school like this with less than 300 students. Um, we have two of each grade level and we only have our enrollment for each grade level is in the thirties, so none of my classes are above 15 or 16. Um, one of my classes actually, I think, has 12 to 13 students in each class within the grade. The one large grade I have is 8th grade. It's 33 students. They are not broken up. So they are together for homeroom and they are together reading. They are together for writing and they are together for social studies. They are broken up in levels for math and science.

Respondent #18:

Well it was test scores were definitely a problem. The drop out rate was very high and they attendance rate poor, so they felt that in order to address those needs, they would go and develop these academies and filtering into the needs and to their interests kept them in school. They became engaged with the staff because they knew who they were. They weren't just a number one of 2,000 walking the halls and it definitely, I think, for the high school proficiency test our scores did go up at the time and I think even more important than that is that it kept a lot of these kids in school that especially in the arts academy. A lot of those kids had a chance to do something you know, other than study chemistry and social studies and the things that maybe they hadn't been that successful at before so it addressed their interests.

Respondent #19:

I think a small school is less than 500 children. I think it is some where in the order of three to four teachers per grade level maybe and I think more importantly a small school is when it is possible to know everybody who works or comes to and from the building.

I think the most important thing is that everyone knows everybody in a small school, that children feel that they are connected. Teachers are connected to the parents. The parents are connected to teachers and everybody knows everyone, says hello because schools are more than just learning. They are interpersonal relationships.

Yes, I think that it is and really the teachers themselves have said this that they don't feel connected. They don't know everyone. They don't have a time to get to know anybody else that may be on the other side of the building, which is 900 feet away from them. The schedule won't allow for them to have that interaction that they want. I think the word they used was isolated. That was the word they used. The children feel similarly. They might know some people from the community activities like soccer. They will know the people that are immediately in their classrooms, but they will not know a large percentage of their classmates, their grade level mates.

Respondent #20:

The beginning of my educational career was in District T, a very diverse community. Actually I am a graduate of District T High School and that's a larger district and I preface my answer by this for various reasons because children went from a pre-school/kindergarten program in one building to a first and second grade school in another building, third and fourth, etc. Here our children come here and they are here. So a small school to me is where there is a community and there is essentially one building and you've got all of your children here from kindergarten

through eighth grade and I said that we have a pre-school disabilities class too and that I just started last year because I didn't think that my pre-schoolers should be on a bus for half an hour going some place else either. So, essentially a small school is to me like the one room school concept. People really are rather spoiled here and I use that word and I don't mean that in a negative connotation. I mean more; we have less than 20 students in most classrooms. Its private school numbers; actually its probably better than private school numbers and the education that is received here is very high and parents like that we know the kids. I know every single student in my building. The bus drivers know every single child in the building. So therefore, if a child's parents aren't at the stop, the bus driver knows that because they know the child since kindergarten. You can't replace that in a large district. You just can't and the feelings. We know the families. I have parents who ask me to call them by their first name. You know, I try to keep it Mr. and Mrs. but in this rural type of community; to them it means a lot to say by their first name. I have parents who bring me dinner if they see my car hear too late. That would never happen in a larger district or the farmer in the field that says to me one weekend, would you like fresh corn. He just brings it. You just don't get that in a large district and they trust you with their kids. September 11th, my building wasn't evacuated. Some parents came to take their children, but certainly the first person at my door was the fire chief to tell me that anything you need we'll be here. It's really hard to put some of those things in words because it's just a sense and when you create a community like that within your school too and it takes work. When you do that and you develop that trust, families think highly of the school and know that it is a safe place for their kids to be and all the trust is here.

Respondent #21:

Well I know District Q was the smallest Group 1 high school in the state. It housed grades 7 through 12, so there was an wing for the upper middle school and then there was the high school. The school was really and junior high and a high school all in one. The benefits were that kids could do everything. My son when he graduated had a resume a mile long of the things he did. He played soccer and baseball and was part of clubs. There weren't a lot of kids so you could do probably about almost anything you wanted to do. And you know, being small everybody knew everybody.

Question 3

How do students benefit from small schools?

- a. *How are attitudes, attendance, dropout rates and graduation rates affected?*
- b. *How are achievement, a sense of belonging, and extra curricular activities affected?*

Respondent #1:

The benefits that I see not only with my own children who graduated from a very small school district, is that a small school gives you more of a hands-on with the teachers in charge of the classes. The students aren't numbers. They're individuals within the school district. The administration knows the students. It's a more of a homey atmosphere, more conducive to learning. That is because the teachers know the kids. The administration knows the kids. It is difficult for the child to hide.

CB: THE BENEFITS OF A SMALL SCHOOL WITH REGARD TO WHAT IS THE COST PER GRADUATE?

Respondent #1:

That is an interesting measurement tool. One of things that I have noticed in my school districts is an annual report that the schools have to file as far as attendance. I think all of my school districts, again primarily in the county all exceed the 95th percent average daily attendance. You're not going to get that same results in a large school district because the kid is easily disappearing. They simply fall through the cracks.

Respondent #2:

I think the number one thing and the main reason that people want a small school is safety, at least now, the safety and security. I mean when you are in a small district like this, you know everybody. You know every kid. You know every parent. Even with the new the new kids and the choice kids, it still doesn't take long to acclimate, because the school is small. We always say, I'm never going to say that we are 100% safe, but I'm pretty close. When you are in a much larger district safety and security a.k.a. Columbine and places like that, the security risks are a lot higher and parents feel comfortable in a school that is small and that is one. The other benefit, I think, when you talk about academics and curriculum and you talk about student achievement in a smaller district again because you are small, you have a better opportunity to monitor what the kids are doing a better opportunity to have more parental contact. And in smaller districts, you don't have a high turnover of staff. Most of the people who have been here have been here forever and when you get that you get the teachers teaching the kids and taught the parents and so the whole kind of family involvement in smaller districts. Financially, it can go either way. When you are small like us, and we are a choice district, obviously the financial is better. When you are a smaller district that really struggles financially because they are small and the state really puts a lot of pressure on them to regionalize. When you go to a J district, like an Emerson or some place in North Jersey, Upper Saddle River, because they are economically affluent, they can afford to keep their buildings open. Five years ago, the state of New Jersey decided to open up a five-year pilot program called Interdistrict Public School Choice and what they did was they sought out 11 districts that would be interested in possibly doing it. I did not apply, Tom and Ronnie, the BA that was here did. They were the ones that really took the initiative to do that because we were about ready to close. They had lost so much state aid here over the years when they recalculated the SEPA formula that they were really hurting financially. There is no growth here because it is a pinelands district. Um, so they got the application approved and so when I came on board it was really our goal to make the choice program a success. Basically what it is, is any student that attends their public school, a resident public school for one year, can apply to come hear as choice from first grade onto eighth grade. So the first year the program opened up, we had about 18 kids. It was a new program. We didn't want to really open up too many seats because we really wasn't sure how it was going to fly and you know, there are always bugs you are going to run into. Um, but over the last four years, we now have about 120 choice students coming within a 30-mile radius in this area. They are allowed to come within 30-mile radius and that is how the parameters are set. Now the program is up for renewal in January and there is a pretty good shot that the program will get re-authorized. It is a very successful program. We

have some changes in code that we want to change regarding the program, but pretty much it is going to stay in tact as it is. Non-discriminatory, I mean you know, we can't discriminate against who we take. We can deny a special ed child choice if I don't have the program here that meets their IEP and their needs and I have had to do that a couple of times, because we're small and we only have a resource setting. I don't have a self-contained and I have a couple of kids with extensive IEP's and that we just couldn't meet the need and this year was the first I had to actually send some kids back because they didn't meet academically and they were going to be retained to I sent them back to the district. So, for here financially, it was a win-win for here. It is interesting the composition hasn't changed. One of the big issues of choice was, was it going to cause white flight? And we were 98% white before we started and I'm still 98% white now and if you look at the other choice districts, their racial composition and their multi-cultural composition is still the same. So we haven't had that and we have had the gamut. My second year here, our valedictorian was a choice student, so we're getting the gamut of children and they blend in very well with the kids here and they don't walk around with stickers on their head that say they're choice. They really fit in well, so it is a good program. It's another way, especially now with NCLB offering parents another option. You know, if your child is in an unsafe school district, I'll give you an example, Atlantic City High School was deemed unsafe two years in a row. We have no options. There is not another high in Atlantic City that I can send my kids to. Um, but now here is another option for choice that if you are in a district regardless of the reasons why you want out, you have the choice to come here. So, I think it is going work out.

CB: SO DOES A STUDENT FILL OUT A FORMAL APPLICATION TO COME TO YOUR SCHOOL? IS THAT THE WAY IT WORKS?

Respondent #2:

Yes, there is a whole process, there is time lines. You have to do a notice of intent and then apply. Then your sending district has a cap. They can cap 2% per grade level or 7% per school each year of how many kids they let go and there is a lottery process. Like for example if I only have four seats available in fourth grade and I have nine applicants, then there is a lottery process and a waiting list. So, there is a whole procedure and that is all in code. I mean we can't deviate from that.

CB: HOW DOES THE FUNDING WORK?

Respondent #2:

The money that would go the district, this is a classic; the money that would go to the district would come to us. Ok, the line item in my budget called State Choice Aid. So if a child comes from Winslow, I will get \$6,800 in choice aid for that student.

CB: YOUR COST PER PUPIL IS ANOTHER WORDS CHARGED TO THAT SCHOOL?

Respondent #2:

No, it comes straight from the treasury at the Department of Ed. Another words, they give me that money for that kid. Now there was supposed to be a three-year regression to the sending district. They were supposed to get 85% of that aid the first year and then 75, 55 and then nothing. And they did that originally because they didn't want a devastating impact on the

sending district, but over the past three years, they have frozen state aid, so those districts, like the forty kids I'm getting from Winslow, they are still getting full funding for those kids that I'm getting full funding for so the state of New Jersey is paying twice out of state aid for those kids. I raised that issue in Trenton when I was there a month ago, because they were claiming the choice program costs money. I said it doesn't cost you any money, I said you guys are the ones that froze state aid, not us. Oh yeah, that's right, you're paying \$6,800 to the district and they don't even have the kid anymore. For three years now you've been giving them the money, because you've frozen the state aid level. So, I mean that is how it applies, not like a charter. Charter you have to get the money from the district. Here I get it straight from the state of New Jersey. Last year we had a \$4 million dollar budget; \$1.5 million was choice aid. I had a 6% increase when everybody else only got 2%. So, that was how I was able to buy all these computers.

Respondent #3:

Well, the one thing we are able to do is we really get to know the children. The teachers who teach the special areas, gym, art, industrial arts, computers, music, library, they have the children for all nine years. So from kindergarten to eighth grade, they really get to know the children. The other piece is, because we have now three classes at every grade level, when we pass the children on, the teachers before and the teachers after really have time to communicate with one another and we are able to do grade level meetings weekly. We do the K, 1, 2; 3, 4, 5; and 6, 7, 8 and special area meetings and in fact that was where I was coming from was a sixth, seventh, and eighth grade meeting. We talk about issues for kids and whose doing well with them and whose having problems, so that you can brainstorm what works well in one classroom and find out why it doesn't work in another class or what you can do so that students don't fall through the cracks. The Child Study Team also attends that so we have a full-time Child Study Team on staff and we sort of work together as a family for the betterment of the child. When we design program, we are looking at programming and not fit kids into program, but to ask each year what program we need for the children. For instance, we have a child in seventh grade who is three years above in math. We offer two years above and one year above in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, but we don't have a program for three years and so we came up with a schedule where this child is three years above in an eighth grade class for geometry, but then his seventh grade class for language arts had to be an independent study and so we worked that out. The next year he will do eighth grade literature with an eighth grade class and we're going to offer Algebra II to next year's eighth grade rather than geometry so we can switch with Princeton High School and so that he has been off kilter from everybody else since second grade and this is the only year we had to do an independent study. I think it just gives us more flexibility for looking at children and providing for them. Our attendance is good. We're over 95%. The children have a very positive attitude. We have a Steps to Respect program. We expect the children to be respectful of each other and of the staff and we expect the staff to be respectful of the children. So, it is mutual and we also train our custodial staff, our cafeteria, and our bus drivers with this same philosophy and so it is sort of a family. It is the whole approach to the child, rather than just looking at the child academically. For our organization, we use a Total Quality Management approach, which is Deming's from industry and we have had that since the mid-nineties. When we sit down to a table, we have a steering committee that meets three or four times a year. We have a suggestion sheet that parents, children, teachers, anybody can fill out, but it can't just be a gripe

sheet, it has to be constructive criticism with a positive way of approaching it and maybe a possible solution. We have had the some of the children fill them out and we have had parents and teachers and we have looked at them carefully and some we have done and some we haven't, but I think you always need to reassess yourself every year to see what you are doing well and how you can improve. The minute you think you have reached the utopia, then you are not doing as well as you can do. We do a lot of reflection and self-examination all the time. Our graduation rate; we don't have any dropouts. We only go to eighth grade. But even at the high school level, the majority of our children at Princeton High School graduate and go onto a two or a four-year college.

CB: EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES?

Respondent #3:

The PTO is involved in offering extracurricular activities for the three through fifth graders and they have clubs after school in the fall and in the spring. For the school itself, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade is where we do our extracurricular activities and we have boys and girls soccer in the fall and cross-country. We have girls and boys basketball in the winter and we also do the spring musical in the winter and so that is the other activity that they have. The can pick the play and then in the spring, we have softball for girls, baseball for boys. We have track, which is co-ed and then we have tennis, which is co-ed. So we have both varsity and JV at those levels. So we have quite an extensive program. Last year we had 220 children in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, and we had over 150 of them involved in extra-curricular activities after school. We also have an instrumental music program that we begin in fourth grade and we've grown over the last ten years immensely. Also every child beginning in the fourth grade takes an instrument and we have very little drop out rate. So at this point we have fourth grade band, a fifth grade band, a sixth grade band, a seventh and eighth grade combined band, which we will probably have to split next year and it is also 100 for the combined band. The other levels are around sixty kids in them. The bands and we also offer choruses. Many of our kids are involved in everything. That is what happens in a small community, because you don't have to cut. We also offer an advanced choir, which is by tryouts. There is usually 35 to 40 children in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade who perform in that, but they also perform in the regular choir because you have to perform in the regular one before you can tryout for the advanced and the same way with the jazz orchestra. They play in the concert band or in the colonial band, which is a sixth grade band and they're able to tryout. Again the numbers are usually 30 to 35 in the jazz orchestra. They are very well attended. The jazz orchestra and the advanced choir meet before school. There are not during school hours. The rest of them are during school.

Respondent #4:

Once again you are limited because in terms of extra curricular activities I'm just using District C as the example. We had a courtyard and we didn't have any formalized teams of any kinds. We had intramurals where the kids played among themselves. You are limited to what you can provide in a small district and once again it all comes back to the funding. Whereas in larger school districts, you have the money that you can do it. You can pass referendums to build new schools. In a small district people move into the district because they like the size of the district and they really don't want to see it growing so you are really limited to the extra curricular

activities that you can provide. However, the District C Board of Education has a phenomenal staff of teachers that give of their own time to establish debating teams and chess clubs and they weren't lacking in extra-curricular activities, but it was all in-house. We didn't travel to other townships for intramural sports or anything like that so you are limited.

Respondent #4:

So we went in and we served as Chief School Administrator for the year 2003-2004 last year. Small districts some of the pluses and minuses. I mean naturally when you have a district of 128 kids, I mean the benefits are everyone knows each other. I mean the kids all know all of the teachers. All of the teachers know all of the students. All of the parents know all of the teachers and it's very much like a family. Some of the problems are you don't have the ability to really develop your school as some of the schools that are larger in nature. By that I mean that if you have a school district where there are 30 buildings in the district, clearly you are going to develop a world-class middle school. Well in a school like District C, you don't have the resources really to provide middle school services. So there are pluses and minuses and I think if you ask the community, the biggest plus that they like about having a small school district is that closeness that everybody gets to each other and gets to know each other. I think you are going to see the direction changing with some of these school districts. In fact the year that I spent out there, we began to realize that I don't know how much longer you can continue to operate as a smaller district because with the regulations coming from the Department of Education where they have just put a threshold on administration fees and they put a threshold on how much fund balance, that's your you can hold over from year to year, it really has a tremendous impact on the smaller districts. Perfect example is in District C we had a budget of 1.9 million dollars. By law when you go into the year you can't exceed 6% fund balance or surplus, which isn't a lot of money. Now with that being reduced to 3% if by chance you received two new students into your district and both children are classified that require out of district placements that could shoot your entire surplus. Then, where do you go for the funding? When you are in a small community, small community is usually comprised of a combination of both senior citizens and young families that are raising their children and when they see the costs going up in small districts often times your budgets are defeated. The year that I went into District C fortunately we did a good job of promoting our budget. It was very fiscally responsible and it passed. However the previous year it was defeated. The township decided to take \$50,000 back from the district and \$50,000 in a small district can really have an impact. I mean it could be your technology person and in our case that's what it was because we lost our technology person. And with all of the mandates that the DOE keeps passing on that you have to have a technology plan and you have to be providing this and that, it becomes rather difficult. So what I began to think about when I was in District C was there has to be a way maybe we could partner up with a neighboring township such as a Bethlehem or such as a Holland Township and we could merge the two districts into one district and maybe make District C a K through 3 and maybe send our District C students when the hit grade 4 to Bethlehem and develop the school building in Bethlehem into a world-class middle school. However, that is a tough sell because in order to do that, you have to have a buy-in by both boards of education. They have to be in total agreement on that. You have to do what they call a feasibility study to see the kind of impact that it is going to have and you have to make sure that it is going to not make the racial balance out of whack. So there are a lot of variables. A process like this doesn't happen over night. It really takes a couple of years to implement and to be looked at carefully and fortunately for the District C

Board of Education, we helped them find a very, very qualified chief school administrator who also had his principal certificate. So we left the district I would like to say in better shape than we found them and I stay in close contact with them, but they are still struggling with the same issues. Funding is the biggest problem and providing the breadth of program that you can provide in a small district, it really it does limit you. Some of the downsides that I hear of a small district and this is what I've heard of some parents come and tell me is that the student who is now in the 8th grade, she has come through 8 classes of school in District C and they have been with the same children all the way through and they think from the social standpoint that they are not getting the same socialization skills that they needed as opposed to if they were exposed to a larger number of students. So in this particular case the mom wanted to take her youngster out of District C and transfer him into the neighboring district, which had a larger population and naturally they can offer a wider array of programs for the students.

Respondent #5:

There is a common phrase: you get a private school education in a public school. The class sizes are reduced and more one to one instruction, the community seems to be closer, and there is more of a connection between school and the community, parents and staff, parents and administration. There seems like there is more pride and ownership as well from my experiences anyway.

CB: HOW ARE THE SENSE OF BELONGING AND THE ATTITUDES OF THE STUDENTS?

Respondent #5:

Because they know each other, there is cohesiveness there. There is a flip side to this too. Um, one of the things being that you don't have the flexibility to move students to move students in grades when personalities conflict. That is what I have found at least in this system here. That flexibility is missing only because we have on class per grade level, where other small schools that I have been in prior to here, you had at two or three or maybe four at least you could choose from when those situations arose.

CB: HOW ABOUT THE BENEFITS IN TERMS OF ACHIEVEMENT AND EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES?

Respondent #5:

Well we are lucky here. We have a student council advisor and some staff that do some things after school. Um, but then again the numbers are limited. For example, a chorus concert would consist of three grade levels instead of one or two because we don't have those numbers. Phys. Ed classes sometimes have to be combined because you have to have enough for a team where two classes would equal 20 students. Achievement, like I said because you have small numbers in class, the teachers instead of spreading yourself over 25 students, you have 10 or 15 students or less and there is more one to one time that they get to have. The ratios are smaller.

Respondent #6:

I think they get benefits from the culture of the school, the knowledge the teachers have of the children. I talk in a small school and the teachers knew the parents and they knew the kids. Many of them had taught the parents, but they had being small in a small faculty room and so forth. They knew the kids and that is good and bad, but it is better it is good as a whole. The bad part is uh; the impressions give early on sticks with them throughout their time. In a small school with a few classes you have only a few options of where to switch children to compensate for this impression that people have. It may have been earned but I found that you know, harassment and also the stereotype that some of the teachers had toward the children based upon maybe any older brother or sister. In fact you may not have heard the statement, are you going to be as good as your sister or your brother. That I think is a negative, whereas in a larger school where I have administered, I could switch kids around. I could switch them from one school to another if conditions were such that they deserved that.

Respondent #7:

I think that a school district, even a large school district, that may have 10,000 or 15,000 students, if they are able to break the schools into smaller compartments where they do not have 2,000 or 3,000 students, but have a school that would not have any more than six or seven hundred kids, I think is really beneficial to the kids because the staff can really get to know the kids; get to know the families. I got experience working in a high school with 2,400 students and it was three grades and I was the principal and I have to tell you that I know all of the kids; I was lucky to know 10% of the kids in a district that size. Most of my time was really being the executive principal and we had four assistant principals, department chairpersons and supervisors and it was just a large undertaking to manage. I was more of a manager, than really getting in and working with the children directly. So I think when you get into a situation where it is small, it can be more intimate. Faculty members can really get to know kids, get to know their backgrounds and get to know the families. Families can get to know them and there is a tremendous benefit to that. I also feel that there are a lot of kids that we are losing as a result of the size of their schools. There are kids that by the way will act out. They come to school. They behave themselves, but in many cases they could be in crisis and we won't even know it. And when they end up in a crisis, we say gee how did that happen because we really haven't had the time to really get to know the youngster and know what is going on with that child. So I think that small is, and if you take a look at what is happening now in urban districts, the urban districts are recognizing that and have districts that are a lot smaller because they realize that these large high schools depersonalize. Kids are getting lost; they don't know anybody in the school. There's not a connection between the staff and the child. And now they are building schools that are smaller. One particular school that is being built now in Philadelphia that I have some involvement with or somewhat involved with through an architect who is building the school that is 700 kids in an urban area. This makes a lot of sense and they are going to be able to really get to know those kids.

Respondent #8:

Well, here you know the attendance, the attitudes and graduation rates don't apply to us since we are K to 8 versus K to 12. Although our attendance, I mean K to 8, you normally really don't have an attendance issue. So I think compared to most districts we're very high in attendance. I

mean we really don't have any problems. We don't have kids leaving or any of that. Kids are very positive. It's a very close community and I guess the school is the hub of the township here. Everything revolves around the school. All the activities are here and things like that so it's more of a community kind of thing.

CB: AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES?

Respondent #8:

Well we do everything here, you know we have sports and chorus and band and art club and every possible activity you would think that a larger district would have we have here as well. Interscholastic, we compete with other schools in the area that are the same size, some larger. Sometimes the kids get a little discouraged because we do compete with a Flemington school district, which has 3,000 students, and so we have a hard time beating those teams. They are our neighbors so we play them and we've beaten them so we are ok.

Respondent #9:

I think the chief benefit is the individual attention that the students get from everyone. The students go through the system and they are not anonymous. Everybody knows the student, the families, and the interactions. In my previous district, they had a workshop on the gray area student and these were students that they didn't have a gifted in talented section for and they didn't have special education, but they weren't really performing at their potential, but they weren't behavior problems and so they called them the gray area child. So they didn't have any significant attributes to have a special program for and you just don't have that. I mean all children everyone knows them. Every faculty member knows that name of every single student at my school and I would guess that the majority of the parents know the name of every single student at the school. So there is just an immediate understanding of the child and their needs and if there is anything wrong, you pick up on it right away. Um, I think students themselves might not always see the benefit. I think for them they are very adaptable and may sometimes be feel confined in a smaller school, but there is a sense of safety of being insulated where you know everyone. Um, and all the staff knows you so it is not as intimidating coming to a small school.

Respondent #9:

Well, one of the touch tones you have is internally you can be a certain way and everything seems normal, but what I have noticed is when we have students who transfer in from out of district, they often have certain gaps they are missing and perhaps that is true for everyone. I don't know, but for ours it has been rather remarkable. The students we get in are significantly lower and need a lot of support and individualized instruction and you know we do like a summer tutoring or work with the parents to try to bring them up to the level of the other students. I don't know if that is because we have a unique kindergarten situation where we have a full-day kindergarten and half the size of the classroom. All of our other grade levels are combined. So we have first second, third fourth. So the kindergarten is a half a class size. So, last year we had six. This year we're expecting ten. So, if there is one teacher for that, they do make remarkable progress in there. So if we get someone who transfers in at the first or second grade, it just seems like our kids are further ahead than they are.

Respondent #9:

The other thing about intervention is I would say it occurs at any earlier age than in larger districts. It is not like November or December when a child moves in that the wheels start turning and I mean it seems like we pick up on their needs and do some intervention at an earlier age. So I would say that our intervention is really very successful.

CB: SO YOU ARE SAYING EARLIER IN THE SCHOOL YEAR AS WELL AS IN THE CHILD'S SCHOOLING?

Respondent #9:

Both. In a bigger district, you can get a new teacher who might not know what the norm is and there is a problem and they can go a whole year. You know depending upon before that child finally gets picked up. There is a real issue, a real concern. Whereas as an administrator I touch base within the first week of school for all the new students. I mean the new student, it's not like you get very many of them. So, it is like our antennas are up. How are we doing? What's going on? And um, the ratio of teachers to administrators, I think is very important too because I have my fingers in the sort of pot of all the classrooms what's going on. Who is doing well? Who is having a bad week? Who is having a bad day? I mean my teachers just drop in all the time. So I really I think I get a good understanding of what's going on in school as a whole. And just to reiterate what Rick was saying about the parents just like the no child gets left out. The parents can't just hide on the sidelines. For us our PTO is very engaged, very active and um, all the parents sort of get involved in some capacity. We had a rummage sale we are doing it now every year. But our first rummage sale was like a big and new endeavor and looking back, every single parent helped out. Every single family had somebody contributing, setting up or working at it, or cleaning up. Everybody sort of did their own specialty. You know the guys were hulling away trucks and they didn't want to sort it, but you just had 100% involvement and I have never seen that. Usually there will be an active handful.

Respondent #9:

Speaking of staffing, also I think you can get what I would call a dunce into a larger district, and they can find a niche or a place or an administrator who is on their way out in hiring. They can sort of manage to get by and they are kind of stuck in the system. But rather in a small district, they can't hide. So, I think overall you end of with, at least in our case I can't speak others, you end up with a quality staff because the rest of the staff is just not going to tolerate this one person who isn't carrying their own weight and becomes quickly apparent that this is not the right place for them. Because they are the new teacher. It isn't like there is a whole lot out there. They run the show.

Respondent #10:

Ok, I too agree that one of the major benefits is that no student slips through the cracks and again the same thing. The student in the gray area coming from larger districts that's always a concern. A child who doesn't receive special education, basic skills, or gifted and talented and when that is a larger portion of the population, you do want them to achieve to their maximum potential. So, I like the idea of knowing every child, knowing every child's achievement record, that every teacher knows every child same thing. Uh, the principal knows every child by name, knows every child by achievement profile. Uh, it is a double-edged sword because there are

situations of personal families situations that happen and maybe dysfunctional and that too is known throughout the community. So, you know there are pros and cons. In terms of achievement and a sense of belonging, certainly for a K-6 elementary environment, the sense of belonging is remarkable. It is a community. The school is a community and the community values the school. So, you have a whole sense of community where parents as partners kicks in big time. Uh, and I think that is important anything from a small fund raiser to a large community field day or school musical becomes an entire community event which is remarkable. That I haven't seen in larger schools to the degree I see in small schools. Achievement and extra curricular activities certainly you should be able to maximize student achievement and make sure everybody reaches their potential with small class sizes and small student populations. Extra curricular activities gets a little tougher to make sure there may be two or three students that have an interest that you can't fill a club up and so we try to even meet the needs of two or three students who have particular interests as well. But that gets a little more difficult to fill the slots. You can't run as many clubs and activities after school. So, attendance and drop out rates doesn't really affect us that is more at the high school. In terms of attendance, I think the nurse and the administration are definitely more able to pick up on family crisis needs and student attendance needs and actually intervene offer some kind of intervention if needed. So, no one can possibly slip through the cracks regarding attendance.

Respondent #10:

Right, right. The child is identified earlier. And there is no room for error with the staffing. You know as soon as you bring someone in within the first three months.

Respondent #11:

Attendance, you clearly can keep a much closer handle on attendance and when kids aren't there we call the families. Where are they? What's going on and they say what can we do to help? Can we send home homework, that kind of stuff? Collective attitudes, I think is one, we are a school family. We are all in this together and everyone in the family has a different job to do and the primary job of our school is to have children feel comfortable and safe and learn as much as they can. I think that is kind of the attitude that is there. I didn't create that attitude. That attitude was there upon my arrival. Drop out rates is high school.

CB: HOW ABOUT EXTRA CURRICULAR?

Respondent #11:

We don't have enough extra curricular activities. We have a inclusive gifted program and includes things like Science Olympiad and those kinds of things. We have music instruction, both individualized and band and chorus and those kinds of things. So we are kind of limited to those right now. We are looking to expand that area a bit. Uh, the young man who is the assistant principal, technology teacher, and curriculum director and I are looking to do some kind of soccer club in the fall for example a couple times a week in the back of the school. We don't have a lot of money, so we have to, another implication of small schools is you've got to take advantage of your resources and also beg, borrow, and steal whatever you can.

Respondent #12:

I think if teachers get to know the students well all over their buildings, the social, and the intellectual. It helps the teacher provide the best possible opportunity for that student. It also being able to engage that student knowing what their strengths and areas of deficiency are helps better provide an opportunity for students to be able to better demonstrate what they can do. I think there are more opportunities for that to occur in a smaller setting than a larger setting. I look at those opportunities as not just standardized tests, that is one of them, but it should never be the only one. So I think you can provide them with many more opportunities for students to demonstrate what they can do. I think that's critical.

Respondent #12:

Well when there is a good relationship between teacher and students and in our school, most of our students stay with the teacher for two years. So it's not a traditional looping, it is a more of a modified looping. We are able to spend the grades three through four together and five and six together, seven and eight together. So each one of those clusters has a core of teachers that really educates the students in all subject areas for two years and that provides really a good basis the teachers to be able to know what the students can do, provide an individual program basically for them based on our curriculum and the Core Content Standards, but tailor it to what the students' strengths and areas of need are and then that obviously will provide the best possible education for students. In addition to that, they will get to know the parents very well so then you've built that partnership between the school and the parents.

CB: HOW MANY SECTIONS DO YOU HAVE PER GRADE LEVEL?

Respondent #12:

One.

CB: SO YOU HAVE ONE THIRD AND ONE FOURTH?

Respondent #12:

Except right now we have two kindergartens and we have two sixth grades, but our class sizes are remarkable. In both cases the classes are 11 to 14. So really are able to provide not just at small school, but a small class sizes within a small school.

Respondent #13:

Yes, I can add, but keep in mind I am coming from the perspective of the bill payer, the accountant and the facilities, so I am not directly involved with the students. I grew up in a small school in a small, rural community. I can tell you one thing having been in my previous district, even though there were small schools there, one school was small with 250 kids but it is only K through 2. When the student moves onto third, fourth, and fifth grade, a whole different set of teachers, he moves to the other side of town, different principal, everything is different. Here, from the parents' perspective, they get to know the principal, the superintendent, and all of the teachers and they watch their child go from kindergarten through eighth grade and you know, we don't have much staff turn-over here. The teachers here have been here a long time, but even if you, with our low turn-over, I mean they get to know the teachers very well and they know when they come in as a first grader that likelihood of who is going to be teaching them when they're in

sixth grade and it's a much better environment that way. The other perspective is from the students'. The one thing that I noticed is that as I'm getting to know the Child Study Team people and watching some of the kids from the hallway as I walk by, the kids that have special needs are identified early and the communication is there. Ok, in other words, each teacher appraises, first of all, they input and say, I think this student may need a little extra help and it's a more personalized, I think, approach than you might find in a large school or even in a "small" school in another area. So that's what's impressed me. They identify kids up front and try to intervene to help them to bring them along if in fact they need some supplementary help. I don't think you're going to get that in a large school. I know you're not going to get that in a large school.

Respondent #14:

We talked about this the other day along with some of my colleagues and the benefit is that it is very rare that the student falls through the cracks. You know your youngsters extremely well. You know when they are having a good day. You know when they are having a bad day. You know when to be a little gentle with them and you know when to say, you know what you just have to do it because this is a requirement and you know that much better than you do with a student in a much larger student population. I can remember when I first starting teaching, my student enrollment for ninth and tenth grade students was 150 youngsters at the high school level. I have less than that in a K-8 school now. So, I had trouble learning all my kids in the high school, because I would see them on a four day week schedule and what happened seventh period, I wasn't able to get back to them until seventh period the next day. By that time I would have forgotten about some of the nuances that had to be dealt with. Here in an elementary setting, when you see the same youngsters all day long and you have the opportunity to follow up and it is a good opportunity.

CB: HOW ABOUT WITH REGARD TO ACHIEVEMENT AND EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES?

Respondent #14:

Achievement, that is hard to measure because you would like to say they have many more opportunities for achievement, but when we look at it in terms of high stakes tests that the kids are measured with, the sample size for a school this size is extremely small. I think for NJ ASK4 we had eleven kids to take that test in fourth grade. So, yeah, we look good on paper, but we had a particularly good class that year and you don't have the kind of diversity in that population you would find in a larger district. In terms of extra curricular activities, I think it is a wonderful opportunity for kids to be involved because if you go out for the basketball team and you can breathe, you've made the team. There are opportunities for kids to become involved in whether you are talking about chorus, or whether you are talking about basketball, or you are talking about the yearbook, they are involved and they love school. You've got to push them out the door at the end of the day because there are just so many good things for kids to be involved in on any given day. Sense of belonging? Every kid knows me in the school and I know every child here and I know them on personal levels. I know what is going on in the family. I know when I can tease them and make them laugh and I know when to step and let them have some space because they may be going a particularly tough issue. I don't think you get a chance to

know that quite as well in a larger setting. I think that is the benefit of small schools. You really get to know your kids.

CB: DO YOU HAVE ONE CLASS PER GRADE LEVEL?

Respondent #14:

Yes, this is a rarity here. It is a blessing, but it is also part of the difficulties that you have to work with and especially when you have parents come in to champion the cause little Johnny or Mary who is having a rough time with somebody else in the classroom. In larger schools with more sections, you often have that luxury of saying, OK if they are not getting and it is really interpersonal discord between the youngsters, you can change them to different classes. I have done that in larger settings. Larger settings being 500 kids with maybe two or three sections per grade level. Here, you just have to cope and get along, because there is nowhere else to put you. That has its positive aspects and also it has its negative ones. If you are with the same group for eight grades, you know, they get to be like siblings after a while. He is looking at me. He is touching me, are the types of complaints you get after a while with these kids. You learn to say to kids at that stage of the game, just deal with it.

Respondent #15:

I think educationally, I really can only speak from our experience from our school. I think that the environment is such that the teachers like the community, like the school district they work in and the fact that it is a small school. I think that it encourages them to stay and want to stay even though maybe some of the benefits aren't there or the opportunities for promotions and things like that, but the environment is so good that the teachers tend to want to stay here. So we have tenured teachers who are very experienced here; very good teachers and so I think that the students benefit from that, from their experience. I think the sense of community that is built into a small school. It is the center of our community. A lot of the activities whether it is educational or not takes place there. So I think the community benefits as a whole from that.

CB: SO YOU DON'T HAVE VERY MUCH TEACHER TURN OVER?

Respondent #15:

Very little teacher turn over.

CB: HOW ABOUT THE BENEFITS WITH REGARD TO EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES?

Respondent #15:

That is probably one of the things that we struggle with as a small district providing things outside of the state required curriculum. If that is what you are talking about extra-curricular activities, after school programs, sports programs. That's one of the challenges of a small district where you are financially, we struggle to keep and meet the basics and to be able to provide the extra things is very difficult and part of that is because we're also considered a wealthy community by state standards. So we get very little assistance from the state. Most of the funding of our school is by the taxpayers in town. About 4% or 5% of our budget comes from

state funding, whereas many school districts in the surrounding area may get 20% or more state funding.

Respondent #16:

Well, I think I really answered that question in preceding one. The fact that you get to know everybody. You know what their strengths are, their weaknesses are. If they are having a bad day, how do you work around that and you can also provide so many programs to them on a more individual basis. You get a handle on what they are thinking whether they are doing, whether they like something, whether they don't and then you tailor make it so that they can get the most out of what it is you are trying to get across. So that is how I think they really benefit.

Respondent #16:

How is achievement, sense of belonging, extra curricular activities affected? Uh, we do everything. Our children work hard. Some achieve to honors status. Some do not, but they all feel a part of the one and we do have every activity you could think of. Certainly it is more difficult at times to fill the positions for say the girl's basketball team. We only have about 40 kids totally in our middle school, but we wind up with a team every year.

Respondent #17:

I think that I would look at saying that I, and maybe this is my guidance background, but that sense of belonging and that sense of individual attention that I think is more possible in small school. With my experience in elementary, when we are talking about this kind of thing, I think that in a small school obviously your teacher knows you very, very well and you are in a self-contained classroom by and large and you have that relationship which is very nurturing, but in a small school all of the teachers know you and they are all vested in your success. They are all your cheerleaders. That has been my experience so I think that is an added benefit. I think that just by the very nature of numbers in a larger school, it's just not possible, you know, for all the teachers to know all of the children and to be actually have lots of opportunities to interact with them. One of the most wonderful experience that I saw in C in the school that I was principal of was we had a very nurturing kindergarten teacher and of course kindergarten is a very difficult transition, but of course first grade is also sometimes more difficult than kindergarten. The presence of the kindergarten teacher and her availability and accessibility to the children as they moved on through the grades really made their transitions, every single one of them into first, into second, into third, so much easier because there was Mrs. M and I can always go to Mrs. M. I can pass her classroom; she'll smile at me. If she's out in the hall, she'll give me a hug. If she sees and she is very perceptive, that I am not having a good day, you know, she is very good at that positive feedback and she really you know that is the kind of thing that was happening, but she personified that. So I think in a small school, you have that. It is just sort of a natural part of it. In a large school, you know, it's not as possible. It doesn't happen as often. I do firmly believe that the more attention children have on them and the more interest is displayed in them, the more successful that they are. You know, they're not going it alone. You know, obviously their parents are invested in them also, but the more adults you have in your life, involved with you, I think the more successful you will be.

Respondent #18:

Well, I just talked to you about the graduation rate and the dropout rate and the attendance rate and the attitudes. I think um, children not only children, but young adults act differently when they know that somebody cares. They definitely do. We just had an assembly this morning with a poet that came up to do a cultural arts assembly and as she was reading, and I wouldn't say she was reading. She was acting out her poetry about losing her mother. Some of our kids started to cry because they had been in that same. It wasn't necessarily a bad cry; it was almost, I feel your pain kind of a cry, you know and I don't know if you would see that in a large school. One of the teachers she automatically slipped down a notch on the bleachers and one of the teachers just put her arm around her and you don't get that in a lot of larger schools so I mean the attitudes definitely. Achievement, I think achievement is affected not just being in a small school. You definitely need to use that to your advantage, which means that teachers have to communicate with each other and that is my goal as a new administrator here to have more of that go on with curriculum articulation. So, District K really our schools have gone up a little and I think my goal is to make them go up even more with some of those practices that we can do here. Um, extra curricular activities we just approved a whole bunch of them at the board meeting last night. There are a lot of clubs here. We have a track club. I approved for teachers to work in them, you know, for a small stipend, but we are going to have a ski club, a track club, um a dance club, intramural sports, a computer club. So a lot of these extra-curricular activities are things that you don't always have. We have a safety patrol that thinks that they are a little FBI. They are so funny. They take it very seriously and another school that might be considered dorky or I don't have to listen to you, but here oh, they are in charge. They even almost tell me what to do. It is really funny, but they put that orange strap on and become something else. Its like John Wayne loading his six gun. So I think those are the types of things, you know, that you don't always see in a bigger school.

Respondent #19:

I think the most important thing is that everyone knows everybody in a small school, that children feel that they are connected. Teachers are connected to the parents. The parents are connected to teachers and everybody knows everyone, says hello because schools are more than just learning. They are interpersonal relationships.

CB: CAN YOU CONTRAST THAT WITH THIS SCHOOL?

Respondent #19:

Yes, I think that it is and really the teachers themselves have said this that they don't feel connected. They don't know everyone. They don't have a time to get to know anybody else that may be on the other side of the building, which is 900 feet away from them. The schedule won't allow for them to have that interaction that they want. I think the word they used was isolated. That was the word they used. The children feel similarly. They might know some people from the community activities like soccer. They will know the people that are immediately in their classrooms, but they will not know a large percentage of their classmates, their grade level mates.

Respondent #20:

We know that if children aren't here, we call. Parents call us. I have had two children truant last. I went to their house. Parents asked me to please call the State Police so that they could scare them a little bit also. It didn't happen again and the best thing that happened is one of the young men who were truant asked me to write him a letter of recommendation for him to get into a high school at the end of the year. He grew. You learn from your mistakes. So they know, you know, you can't hide here. There is a tremendous sense of belonging. In larger districts, you really don't do as many partnerships. I tell our middle school students what role models they are so when you can do partnerships with upper grades and lower grades, it certainly creates a sense of belonging. An example would be at holiday time. We have a sing along and when I first came here the teachers said to me that it would never work, but I said trust me it will. They said it will never work. You put the eighth graders by themselves. You put the seventh graders by themselves, but I said we're not going to do that. The eighth graders can be buddies with the kindergarteners and the seventh grade with first graders. They marveled at how it worked. The eighth graders were different people because they had a child who was counting on them. You can't do that in a larger district. It's just not as accepted. District P is probably one of the only schools that has a Christmas tree lighting, a community Christmas tree lighting. That still surprises me that people come out for them. We light the Christmas tree and that is maybe not politically correct, but that's what this community has done. There is a local horticulture store that donates the tree. So it is interesting. There are a lot of positives. Of course there are some drawbacks. Our middle schoolers don't have an opportunity to have things like home economics that other schools do and middle school is supposed to be a time when you are looking for careers and there is an exploratory stage. We do that the best we can through programs that come in or activity periods, but there is not an industrial arts class or there is not a home economics class, but when you weigh it. And our scores are another thing. Our scores are very good. We're pushing to get better, but you should push for continual improvement. Our annual yearly progress is there, however if you have a class that has a high a number of children who have certain kinds of challenges, your scores are going to plummet and you can't hide. Also, when you look at our per pupil costs, you have children of special needs in large district; you can spread those children out. In a small district, you have two classes and if there's only one child with special needs at a certain grade level, you still need that in-class-support teacher. So the class size might look like the ratio is smaller but it is because of the numbers. There is nothing we can do. We have to provide the services to the kids and in a small school, we have a lunch room/all purpose room, you know physical education facility so that somewhat limiting. You just have to do the best that you can. I do think the benefits outweigh. We have a development pending here and honestly it scares the daylights out of me because I like a small school. Um, everything we do here. I said to you that I was at a larger district where you had to justify what you needed for each of the schools in order for you to get money from the superintendent to give you money for your particular building. You know, they were all our children, but the sense of community I didn't think was as strong. In a small school, every single decision you make is for the benefit of all children. All children, it's not like this school or another school, it's all of our kids and I think that's a real big plus.

CB: HOW DO STUDENTS BENEFIT WITH REGARD TO THE EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES?

Respondent #20:

Budget is a factor. You know you have one community that is trying to support a school of this size too. We have a \$6.1 million budget. Lots of the after school activities, sports wise I'll say, are by the District P Recreation Association. What we have are intramural kinds of activities. A number of years ago before I came, the board took the status away as far as a basketball team etc. but they use our building and again that's again a sense of community. The PTA just worked with the rec association to purchase a scoreboard. So there are partnerships there. Um, so we don't have those kinds of things, but we do have other kinds of clubs. We have a homework club after school. We are looking to have a drama program. Those are all of the things in the works for this year. Maybe not on as large a scale as a bigger district. We have a band. We have some that participate in teen arts, but again our band isn't as large as another place because you have the same population wants to participate in so many different activities and there is only so much time. So that is a piece of it.

Respondent #21:

Like I said earlier, everybody knows everybody. I can remember when the girls basketball team made the state semi-finals it was a big deal. Then when they went to the states there was a caravan of cars all lined up following as they went up North Jersey to some community college to play. When they won, you might have thought that they won the Olympics. They had a parade for them and it was great. So in a small school, these are big things and everyone gets involved with it. We had our struggles with a bare bone budgets, but the kids had everything they needed.

Question 4

How does a community benefit from having a small school within it?

- a. How do community members perceive it?*
- b. How does it provide a hub of the community?*

Respondent #1:

From my experiences, usually the smaller the district, it seems the more involved the community. There are more people working within the school districts. Uh, there are more people involved in the school districts. They take a greater interest. It seems to be a branch of their own homes.

Respondent #2:

This is the community. I mean at least here in Folsom, this is it. This is the focus of the community. I mean borough hall really isn't. So, any events that happen really happen here. To the community, I think that we have had an opportunity to offer, a couple of years back, to offer a couple of computer night courses. It has really been a place where people come for events, Back to School Night, Folsom Family Night, Chinese Auction; all those kinds of things. What we would like to do in the future when we get this new piece done on the building and I have spoken to the mayor, they really need to start a CER program, a Community Educational Recreation program. Um, and do it formally in other words have programs that you offer whether it is internet, introduction to cooking, Spanish, and then use the building to do it. The building sits here 365 days a year and it is only used 180. So, why not utilize this building the

other times and let the community have more involvement and once we get that piece done, there will be more resources to do that.
Anything that happens, happens here.

Respondent #3:

Growing slowly. In 1989 we were about 350. In 1979, we were 250 and we had one development that went in and had over 100 houses and we put on the 1997 addition to do that. Recently we had some more growth again and we put on the 2003 addition. Right now we probably can go up to about 650 to 670 within the building. We have two self-contained Special Education classes, so we don't have to mainstream children out of district. I have teachers with aids in there with multiple handicapped children. We also have I want to say six or seven resource room classes and then we have our regular education classes. What the board has decided to do as far as facility and is to add onto the building and keep the central core and maximize that out rather than to build a separate building, which would cost more. We are bound by the township land so we have no more expandable land left. We have our fields across the parking lot. The tennis courts are ours, but on the other side of that belongs to the township and on the back side of it is the west property and that belongs to the township. So we built out as much as we can this last addition and we have asked the township on the west property to designate between 15 and 20 acres for possible future expansion over the next 50 years for the district. So that is where we are with that.

CB: WITH REGARD TO THE COMMUNITY, HOW DOES THE COMMUNITY BENEFIT FROM HAVING A SMALL SCHOOL WITHIN IT?

Respondent #3:

Well the community benefits in that the school is the central location. A lot of night activities occur here. The golden agers come here for their activities on the weekend. The facility is well used by the community. There is not really, other than a couple of churches with fellowship halls, facilities within the town for the community use. So the school has always remained the central focus. Even the senior citizens realize that the value of their homes is based on the education that the children are receiving and their property values have skyrocketed over the last few years. In the 27 years that I've been here, only three budgets have been defeated and not by much and very little was cut from them so we are kind of frugal when we put our budgets together, but we usually get a three to one vote for the school budget and even for the referendum last time we had a three to one when we put the addition on. We just don't go out and say well we need money; we involve the community in the process. We invite them in when we are doing the budget. We invited them in when we were looking at do we need to add an addition onto the building. We had lots of groups of people who didn't even have children in this school working on the various committees to look do we need a new gym? How many new classes do we need? You know and we worked a whole year on that. So when we went out on the referendum, it was unanimously supported because we made sure that we had people from every different pocket within the community involved in the planning of it. So I think a lot of administrative work and being proactive when we do it rather than reactive and then our results are good. I think that our results are good that we just get that buy in. Our mission statement is a partnership with the community and the parents and the children and we really feel that are our customers and we provide for them.

CB: AND YOU ALSO HAVE THE LIBRARY?

Respondent #3:

We have one of four in the country where we have the public library and the school library combined. The building belongs to the school, but we allow the township to house their books and facilities there. They have a full-time librarian; a full-time staff and we feel it is the best for the community because it allows the community to have a greater wealth of books. The library is open more hours than it would be normally, because they are in here starting at 10:00 in the morning and they go until 9:00 at night for most nights and then there are a couple nights they close at 5. It also provides for the children once they reach sixth, seventh, and eighth grade when they've outgrown a middle school library, they have many adult books and they also have a teen corner there that houses a lot of materials for the high school kids at Princeton. So they don't have to go back to Princeton. They've worked to enrich that resource within the library. So I think it's a betterment for all and advantageous. In addition to that, the children get to rub shoulders with the octogenarian set so that they are seeing other people that are working with them. Also the women's club come in and read to the children. We have the books that McGreevey provides for that literacy club that he has and they send out the books every month and the woman's club come and read the stories in kindergarten through third grade. So we try and make use of the community that doesn't have children in the school so that they are part of it.

Respondent #5:

Well, our school has been used as a community center for events. The Fourth of July celebration or events like that and the parents, because this is a one-mile radius and is a specific type of setup where there is a lot of ownership. A lot of the parents have either gone through the system or relatives of them have gone to this system and that helps. There is ownership extended like an extended family. The community is very, very open to becoming part of this. We have a senior reading where the seniors come in. This summer I did a senior computer course. When our computers were outdated ten or thirteen years old, we permitted the community to come in and come in and pick up those computers and use them for home use, which in a bigger school district you wouldn't have that opportunity; there's too many people.

Respondent #6:

Well I think support would be enhanced by smallness. I think people would take a greater interest. I found that at the elementary level parents had a much greater insight and a much greater sensitivity and responsibility and we all know the PTA are much more supported in the elementary and as the kids get to the larger configurations. It is usually, typically their middle school and there would be a certain amount of disillusionment and a parents' perhaps busy and so forth, but I found the larger the school, the less support, the less participation and again that may be a function of the level because the high school and junior highs were larger. I think that as small school is typically in a small neighborhood where visibility is sort of higher and support is higher.

CB: WITH THE LARGER HIGH SCHOOLS THAT YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT, WERE THERE FOR EXAMPLE ANY ISSUES WITH THEIR BEING LARGER DROP OUT RATES AS COMPARED TO THE SMALLER ONES?

Respondent #6:

I think it is how the school is run. In other words, we encouraged students to remain in school and we offered such a diverse curriculum, there was always something for everybody. I had a bank in the high school so that the children that were going through the business program would be trained and they would actually work in the bank in the school. I had a TV studio with two years of TV production. We had ROTC. I had so many things that my drop out rate was like 2%. So out of 100 kids that went in at the 9th grade, 98 graduated. So I feel that being able to offer a variety to meet the needs and the aptitudes of children is a great advantage.

Respondent #7:

Now there is no doubt that in my mind that communities identify with their local school system. In urban areas they identify locally with the local school and if the school is small, it can really be a part of that small community in a sense of being an integral part of the community. An example that I could give is District D. District D had just a couple of years ago had to decide whether they were going to be able to function. They are a very small school, under 100 students. The community came together and went through a process of taking a look at that decision. There was overwhelming, on the part not just the people, not just the parents and the staff and the kids, but also the citizens that had no really vested interest in the kids, in a sense that we all have a vested interest in educating kids, but they didn't have any kids of their own and they were supportive of the fact that the school should exist. And I think it was because of the school itself being the focal point of the community. So, when you have a small school that is reaching out to the community and reaching out to the parents and touching kids and making a difference in their lives, the community will support that. When you have a very large bureaucracy that removes themselves sometimes from the community, it is really difficult to get that type of support.

Respondent #8:

I think it is like the center of attention in the township. Everything happens here. All the meetings happen here, even if it's not for the school. The cub scouts meet here, the boy scouts, the girl scouts. All the activities, the events that occur in the town usually happen here. We have a large facility here so it sort of happens that way.

CB: DO YOU HAVE BUSING HERE?

Respondent #8:

All our children are bused.

Respondent #9:

Everybody here I think recognizes that there is a lot of work and not enough people to do it and they all kind of pitch in and contribute. Well, I think what Respondent #10 and I have that isn't the same for all schools is that we don't have busing. So the parents come to pick up the kids and drop off the kids everyday. So it is a high level of interaction with the parents in that social.

I assume you do the same Respondent #10, which is we come out of our offices at the end of the day or often at the beginning of the day for just sort of a meet and greet to the parents. They are dropping off; they're talking. You know you are part of that. So you have a direct connection with the parents and you are very visible in the community. And in that informal interactions a lot happens that is different than a formal setup meeting the community kind of formal activity where there is more distance. Cause you can just shoot the breeze and this comes up then so and so. It is all sort of connected within the community. Um, and because you don't send you child off to some distant school. You are very involved and I think the visibility within the community. What is different here than in other school that I have been in is the level of retention of the family members within the community. So we have people whose parents went here, whose grandparents went here, whose great-grandparents went here, and whose great-great grandparents went here. I mean we look at photos from the 1870's and we can pick out all these ancestors of all of our students. So there is a lot of that legacy in terms of the school and stories that come up and I am more used to a more transient and there is a real sense of history. And for my part a responsibility to not, to keep the school together. There is such pressure right now coming from levels to close the school and if you look back at all of the historical documents that pressure has been like waves. It comes, you know you can look from the 1950's and they were going to shut the school down because they didn't meet codes, which indoor plumbing was one thing they had to install. Um, but the events that we have we are going for community events for our PTO. So, they don't really sell the little Christmas ornaments, that kind of things like that. We do pasta dinner with an art auction. So the local artists all bring their artwork. The students all have posters up that they do and they eat and everybody has a good time and they do this art auction. So it brings in all the artists into the community. Or the rummage sale, all the community gets involved and it's become real popular as a community event and um, just trying to use those PTO fundraisers. They do a hoagie sale every year to interact with the community as opposed to it just being isolated and discrete to the school. And I know you do a lot of things with your artists.

Respondent #10:

Couple of things. At District I, also there is a historical piece of children's, parents, parents of those parents, very similar who have also had some of the same teachers who have been teaching for 37 years as well. So it is very interesting when a grandparent will go up to one of our teachers and remember Mrs. So and so as the classroom teacher, which was kind of bizarre for me to get used to, but I've gotten used to it. Same thing daily interaction; walking the talk outside during dismissal or arrival. That definitely keeps your finger on the pulse of the community and it is a great tool to use to know what is going on in the community. But in addition to that, our building is sort of a hub. District I has the center of town, which has all the stores that people go to, but our building is used in a variety of ways for community events and the school musical is offered to the seniors. We have a senior citizens building right across the street. They get to attend for free. Uh, we have senior citizen breakfasts. You know not around school election times, just because we feel it is important for our sixth graders to serve the senior citizens. We might tie that into a science fair so the senior citizens can see the great things.

Respondent #11:

Yeah, it does and the neat part about our school again I indicated earlier that we are growing. So we had the District J residents are not very transitory. They're basically life long residents.

They have been there forever. Their parents went to the school. Their grandparents went to the school. Whereas we have 138 new, very expensive homes now, so we have an influx of these new families and new children who have very, very different expectations for our school; a lot higher expectations for our school. I mean it is a very positive thing. It has been interesting for us to work this all out together the old District J folks and the new ones. These two know my predecessor. I spent a little time with him and would never want to say anything negative about him, but piggy backing on what Rich had to say, we really didn't a year and a half ago, really didn't have a curriculum. So in a year and a half we worked very hard in that area and we do have a curriculum now. We do have goals and objectives that we're going to deliver to kids. Standards weren't really looked at very closely. Teachers weren't supervised and evaluated very closely. So, in a big place that would be problematic. It's really not. The teachers are great teachers. They were teaching what they needed to teach, so the school really wasn't hurting as a result of that. And my predecessor did a great job of picking faculty and that is really the critical difference in all of this anyway. So, they were right on target with what they were doing regardless of whether or not they had a clearly defined curricula. But you can do those kinds of things in a smaller place much more quickly. The system itself is a lot more responsive than a large system can be. You know, organizations are very slow to change and educational organizations are the slowest and higher ed. in particular is the slowest just in case you are interested.

Respondent #12:

I think in our setting, our community very much values our school. We are really the key center of our community because it is such a small town; this is the large meeting place. This school is used around the clock for recreation, community events. They have every December the first week in December the giant craft fair that's almost, certainly regionalized known and people just flock here to do that and we make our school available. We had just this last weekend an international film festival here for two days. It was sponsored by some people locally in our town and used the facility for that. So I think people realize that this isn't just a place where kids go to school. It's a place where people gather in the community and it's used almost all the time and I think that's really an important piece. The other way is that because we are small, the kids' efforts are valued by the community and not just by parents. So we have a newsletter that goes out twice a month. That is a community newsletter/school newsletter that we publish in cooperation with the editors who are actually two parents in the community and it's not just a newsletter about our school. It is a newsletter about our community and we provide a lot of education informational in it, but it is much more than that and those are the kinds of things that happen in a collaborative way because we couldn't afford to publish it outside. It has to be done internally and we've got great support from the community and from our township officials as well. We had a flood from hurricane Jean a couple of weeks ago. We had 20 inches of water in our boiler room and the first person here was the fire department chief pumping it out 6:00 in the morning. So those kinds of things automatically happen. We don't have to go and find somebody or pay somebody to help us. People are just ready to help and jump in do whatever needs to be done. We've got a playground outside that was put in this summer. It was done by community people. That actually built it. They raised the money with no taxpayer money at all. It was all donations and actually had a community build of 33 people on a Saturday in June and put up a beautiful \$20,000 playground. It's only phase one and we have another phase coming in this year. So those kinds of things are really exciting. They are exciting to me, not being from

the town, but seeing how people work together and interact together and really cherish what kind of programs they have and what kind of facility they have and are generally appreciative of it.

Respondent #12:

They plow our upper parking lot in the winter. I mean they bring the truck through. They go by here anyway so they just swing in, clear the parking lot for us, and saves the taxpayers money because we would have to put that on our bill list and pay somebody else to do it.

CB: IT SOUNDS LIKE A LOT OF RELATIONSHIP BUILDING THAT'S BEEN ESTABLISHED.

Respondent #12:

Absolutely. Absolutely, and it is a two way street. I certainly won't take credit for it. Dean won't either, but we feel like we are part of that process right now. We're kind of the stewards at the moment to get this through and to make sure it continues to grow and right now we've got people in those positions in town that are willing to do the same. It is just a terrific situation. I don't think you can get it any better.

Respondent #13:

Just from the facility side like where I really get. I see the cooperation with the township committee and the municipal workers you know, the Department of Public Works. For example, it was going to cost us to put in the new playground, that was all volunteer funds, but now we had the obligation to remove the old playground, which was noncompliant with the current standards. We called up the township and they said we'll send a backhoe over and we'll put the things out for nothing. We'll take it away for nothing. So they did and they came over and did it for nothing. Now I know those guys earn a salary and of course, but I'm saying to the township that they saved us a lot of money and then by the same token, they have the baseball and soccer fields out here and we said we'll tell you what we'll do. Since you fixed our playground, we'll mow the fields for you for the next couple of months and that's what we did. We mowed the fields. We have a pothole out here. I District K you didn't fall in because they are coming tomorrow to fix that pothole, Department of Public Works. We had a tree fall down on our shed. They came over with their chainsaw and a couple of their guys. Zib, zib, zib. It would have cost us hundreds of dollars that would have been paid by the taxpayers. These guys happen to have a little break in their schedule and they came over and in a few hours they chopped it all up and there you go at no cost to the town.

Respondent #13:

That I think is important. If you have your township committee and your small school, and your administration, and board of education and they have a good relationship, you really have a powerful complementary thing. No question about it.

Respondent #14:

Um, they benefit I think because, they don't have to go through as many levels of personnel to get issues dealt with to their satisfaction. One of the difficulties of this building is that there are no barriers between the playground and my office. You walk right in and right into my office. There is no secretary here and you've got to be good on your feet, because you have to size up

what is coming at you rather quickly and to be able to deal with it or to diffuse it or to handle it in some other way to the parents' satisfaction. I smile because I can remember a time ten years ago when I first came here we had an older woman who lived in the back of the property. Times were a lot less guarded with respect to security and I can remember Haddie would come in the back door, walk down the hallway and down the front steps to the building to go across the street to the grocery store, because she didn't want to cross at the corner because she thought that was dangerous. That went on for years and years here. Prior to my coming, she had done that as somebody who grew up in this town and so as a consequence this was her building and there wasn't anything unusual for her to walk through the building to go to the grocery store. And you didn't discourage it because you had a chance to talk to Haddie and see what else was going on in town. Um, you get to know the people in the community extremely well. And what you really get an opportunity to do is deal directly with what is in the rumor mill, because anybody in town will feel comfortable coming up to you and saying, what is this I hear that you guys lost set of textbooks or they threw them out be mistake or that kind of stuff. That would be a non-issue in a larger district. I think the level of accountability and I think the level of communication is a lot more precise in a smaller school district as it larger districts. In larger districts, you can lose yourself in euphemisms and people would say, what in the world are they talking about. Here is more of an opportunity for dialogue for the guy in the street.

CB: DO YOU FIND YOUR SCHOOL TO BE A HUB OF THE COMMUNITY?

Respondent #14:

Absolutely, absolutely. We have 117 kids and in the morning, when opens up I have 35 parents on the playground. Everybody has walked their children to school and we laughingly say we are going to sell coffee on the playground to make some additional revenues here because everybody hangs around and just talks for about an hour and you know what they are talking about. They are talking what is going on in town, what is going on in school, what is going on at the church, the taxes went up 44% this year because the mill downtown filed bankruptcy and everybody got hit with a large tax bill so they use that as the town square so to speak, our playground. They discuss problems that they are having with the community. So, I get to hear a lot of it.

Respondent #15:

I think I can again speak for our school. Thanks to the staff who has sent the value of getting the community involved especially the older population; those who have had children maybe that are beyond school age or maybe even have grandchildren that live elsewhere. So they have no one in our local district. They have reached out to them to bring them in and include them through the Senior Reading Program with the first graders and activities like that. This year we also provided computer training for senior citizens with the new computers that we got to try to bring them in and include them more in what we are doing in the school and that I think has been very successful in keeping them involved in the district and seeing the positive things that we are doing with the students. It is easy enough if you are not involved to think that there is nothing happening. So by keeping people involved in seeing what's going on, I think they are less likely to be concerned about their tax dollars and they are always concerned about that, but they are more accepting of it knowing that it is really being spent wisely and benefiting.

CB: WHO DID THE SENIOR CITIZEN COMPUTER TRAINING?

Respondent #15:

The Principal did that. We advertised it when we first got the computer in this summer on the community bulletin board and we had a number of residents who came to it. We also when we phased in and brought the new computers in, we were facing having to get rid of the old computers which was going to be fairly costly and they were functional. So we advertised them as being available and we delivered them to a lot of the people in the commons, which is where a lot of our senior citizens are. So we delivered them and set them up for them again to try to keep the community relations going. I think that happens in a small district and those ideas come up in a small district. I'm not sure if in a large district those kinds of things can happen just because from an economy of scale standpoint, it is harder to coordinate those things.

CB: WHAT WAS THE THINKING WITH REGARD TO HAVING A SCHOOL OR NOT HAVING A SCHOOL IN THE COMMUNITY?

It's funny, if you draw your conclusion from those that show up at a meeting, you can quickly draw a conclusion that if that represents the community for example, we would have thought that everyone wanted this school closed and that was something that I learned that those that want to be vocal and are against something, will show up and be vocal, but those that are happy and satisfy with the way things are, typically won't show up at the meeting and won't participate. So the feeling was that there was all this pressure to close the school and move kids out and we initially, reluctantly decided to survey the community and really understand where the community was in supporting the school. We wanted to survey not just the parents or those with children in the school. We wanted to survey everyone, so that is what we did. We put together a survey that we thought was unbiased to try to assess and we even put options on there in our eyes were not a direction we wanted to go. We just put it out there just to see what kind of a response we would get from the community. The rate of response on a survey in any kind of survey is usually 10%. You can't expect a whole lot more than that and we have more than 50% of our surveys come back. So we felt pretty good about it representing the community and overwhelmingly. We limited it to six or seven questions so it wasn't too lengthy. Overwhelmingly the response was favorable. I think everyone was impressed with the response in that there was such support for the school to stay. Absolutely. There were just a handful that came back that were really pushing for students to leave and some people even went as far as writing letters. There were people who had students in the school years ago, community members that don't have children in the school now that wrote letters about how important a school is to a community and not just our school, but philosophically how important it is to have a school in the community and to feel good about it and these are people who are paying taxes without children in the school and I think everyone was worried about how this was going to come back including the board, including the teachers and it came back and it couldn't have been more welcomed news in terms of our decision to want to keep the school running. It just confirmed it and really not a single person on the board wanted to move in the direction of closing our school or moving kids out, but once that came back it just gave us the power we needed to just understand that we are doing what the community wants as well. It just supported our stand on it.

Respondent #16:

So, how does a community benefit from having a small school within it? Well, of course the parents love it because they have easy access to the teachers and they are part of the this tailor making educational system for their kid because they can talk directly to the teacher. Teacher can get back to those parents in a timely fashion. It's not a large group. It is a very collegial group and I think the kids benefit from that and they also know that we all know so they can't pull very much because they know somebody knows whether it be their teacher or their parent and the usually the parent and teachers are in cahoots.

CB: HOW ABOUT IT BEING A HUB OF THE COMMUNITY?

Respondent #16:

It is the hub of the community. This school is. Everybody is drawn here. We do a lot of things outside of the regular schoolwork day. We do a lot of shows, plays, activities that center here at the school and since it is a walking district, people can come quickly and kids have easy access to the playground which is new and bright and well lit. It is a place for people to congregate. We have some picnic benches out there. The doors are open most of the time and while we don't advocate parents coming by and dropping things off because we want to teach responsibility, if something does come up we do have easier access than some large districts. I've driven kids home, picked up kids. So it creates a really nice community feel. I think that is one of the best benefits really.

Respondent #17:

I think it definitely does provide a hub for the community because that is where the life of the community is. You know you got the children, the parents, and the teachers. You got that community feeling. Very often with the small schools, the children walk to school so the children are now within walking distance of the school. So the school not only is a place where you know children and their families are sort of focused during the day, but after school you know, they are on the playground and on the weekends, they're there and this is a community resource, the school and its physical plant and its grounds so yes I think it is a hub of the community. I also think that when you are talking about elementary schools, there are a lot of activities, you know, that involve community members. They involve parents and I think that there is a feeling of belonging and of course again, if it is small, you know everyone knows everyone else and I think that there are so many positives to that. And community members perceiving small schools, I think my experience has been that parents love that. They love it for themselves. They see how happy their children are with all of this attention and they love it. The only down side is of course when you get to the fiscal concerns of running a small school.

Respondent #18:

They are very, very involved in the school. Um, they had a PTO meeting the other night that I stayed for and it was their executive board committee, which in my prior school, the executive committee is the officers. It is usually your four officers and then the committee heads. So it is not all the parents. In my former school I would say you had your four officers and may be six or seven other people. Well, there had to be about 30 people here. When I saw the list of committees that they have and there was a person in charge of each one. So, in a small town of

2,600 people and I live in a town of 12,000 and I consider that small. So, I just can't get over the number of people that come out for meetings. It should be relative; like if you have a town like Paterson that is a city of 150,000 people so when you have parent meetings, sometime you had 4 parents. In Totowa at our PTO meetings, we used to have at the executive board the four offices and maybe six or seven people. There were 30 people here the other night for the executive board because there is that many committees that they are all in charge and then they had an athletic meeting here one night after my board meeting and same thing. In my town of 12,000, when you have an athletic club meeting, you might get 10 or 20 parents. There had to be around 40 to 50 people here. So for such a small town, percentage wise the turn out was amazing. Because we are so local, it is all within walking distance. So you know it is not like they have to drive five miles to drive to the school. There is no busing in this district. There is like a little mini bus that pulls up every day with about 8 kids and that is it and I have to say that the majority of my prior job was spent dealing with discipline issues involving bus issues. So, that was the one question I asked of the board at my final interview. When they said to me, now do you have any questions of us, do you have busing? I didn't care what they paid me and I didn't get to ask anything else. I asked do you have busing and they said well we have one little bus and I said Ok. So, yes it does provide a hub of the community, which is just how I explained that, you know, they use this building. The sports clubs use it. The boy scouts use it. I mean today we had a cultural arts assembly; they use it. So it is used for a lot of things.

Respondent #19:

Well I think in a community like this community, the school really is the focal point of the community. It is the place where parents focus their attention and think about on a daily basis. A small school could provide a community with a cohesive factor. I think even though this is a very large school, the parents still do identify themselves by the schools their children attend, but it's not the same. We have a very diverse population geographically spread out locations and I just don't think that's there for this gigantic school. It is more so there in our other school has 800 kids in it. Parents say things like well, parent pickup is so much easier there. Well, no it isn't. It just feels easier because the place feels smaller physically smaller.

Parent pickup here ranges on an average day from let's say 135 to 200 parents coming to pick up their children. Partly because they have after school activities, but mostly because the human endeavor of getting on the bus, waiting over here, moving to the other school, waiting over there and then driving home, taking almost an hour on the bus. I think most parents of kindergarten, first, and second grade children feel unsafe sending their child on a bus. So if they possibly can make it they do. We have 193 parking spaces. We have 157 staff members. So we don't have parking and that bothers me. We have potentially 1,500 parents could show up at will and we have parking for 40. I would say no lie, some where in the order of 80 hours. Planning, making it safe, talking to the right people, getting light bulbs changed, getting lines painted, cones, really imposing on staff members to assist me to accomplish because I can't do it all on my own. It is 1,000 feet one end to the other. I can't be in three places. There are 52 buses a day come into this. Fortunately we have a half a mile long driveway, but they still by the way have to line up in two lines. 52 buses full, not half empty buses and that does not include the 9 buses that bring the kindergarten home and back for the afternoon. So a lot of time in my day is buses. A lot of discipline issues because one thing that I note is economy of scale. It's very much cheaper to do what they are doing here with buses because you can save a lot of money something like \$500,000. But what it does is keep young children in unsupervised locations with bus drivers

who are not certificated people, nor are they trained to deal with a potential 54 children from K through 4. So I spend a lot of time dealing with issues that the bus drivers come up with which could be avoided by eliminating that time on the bus.

My child actually did take the bus. All of them because it was a busy street. There was no reason. We were close enough, but they bused them anyway. I never had even one issue on the buses. The bus picked up my son and two daughters at probably a quarter after 8 and school started at 8:35. They were in their seats at 8:35. I think there were 6 buses and they were empty. There might be 10 or twelve people on that bus. It was just where you lived.

Respondent #20:

We're the hub of all the activity. Most things happen here. District P is approximately 28 square miles for the whole community, much bigger than District AA, which was one square mile. So we have about 28 square miles of mountainsides, so in a small school, the community benefits because first of for the quality of education they get. I believe that's paramount. They are very appreciative. A couple of years ago I wrote over a quarter of a million dollar grant for technology or this school wouldn't have those pieces because we just can't afford it. The community was very, very appreciative of that because those benefits they can see directly going to their kids. They know us. They call if there is a problem. I had a parent come to me this summer telling me that he and his wife were going to separate. I mean that would never happen in a large district where the dad called and wanted to come speak to the superintendent and he was in my office explaining the situation and wanted to give me a heads up before school started. It just doesn't, things like that just don't happen and so they are very comfortable coming in and explaining the situation and knowing that people are listening and no one is going to talk about them when they go out the door. There's really a high sense of trust and they know their kids are safe and they know the personnel. In a large district you do from one school and you have to get acclimated to the people of the PTA and the administrator in the building and the guidance. It is like by the time you get acclimated to it and acquainted with all of the people, then children change to a different school and there is a whole different group of people and there's different rules and regulations. Here is it really the thing. It's not like it gets old and stale because we do continuously try to do some new things. Not try; we do and the community does appreciate all our efforts. I mean I get invited to soccer banquets, the fireman invite me over. That doesn't happen in big places and it wouldn't unless there was that true sense of trust. They love sending their kids here. The community doesn't want this development to go in because they are afraid they'll lose that. You know if you double in size,

CB: ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT A HOUSING DEVELOPMENT?

Respondent #20:

Yes, a housing development of approximately 325 homes. So our 310 students can double. Actually there is a land use meeting that I have to speak at and it could be one of the final pieces before there is going to be a vote. There is a letter to the editor that you might be interested in seeing. Yesterday's paper it was written by Karen Buckley and it was a wonderful lead. You talk about creative writing and how you write a lead. She wrote at the beginning, as you attend District P Schools Back to School Night, walk through the halls and imagine 240 more children. You know and she tried to put that out there. From the tone of that letter you can tell what people want. You know some of the obstacles also; it is interesting because you've got a

community divided as far as whether or not we should have full day kindergarten. So that is a pretty interesting issue. There are a number of families here that feel children should be home until they are five and start kindergarten and that we shouldn't be babysitters for working mothers. You don't do full day kindergarten for babysitting, but you got real distinct opinions on each side and it is a mess of community members who have been here for a very long time and community members who are our new and are asking for some different kinds of things. So it is interesting to see how that meshes together and you don't know what is going to happen with the development. But it is farmland that is out back this way that they are looking to put something on.

Question 5

What obstacles do administrators face in running a small school?

Respondent #1

The most important element that a small school must have is creativity because of the lack of resources of it. The larger the budget for the big school districts; there is naturally a smaller budget and because of that the various small districts have to be creative. Some of my clients have closed their schools became a sending district for a neighboring community. I have clients who are combining services with other districts. They're sharing school business administrators and in some cases they share superintendents. Uh, they have to be creative in the way they finance education just to provide resources for the educational process.

Respondent #2

Being principal is great. Being superintendent is another thing. The biggest obstacle is dealing with the Department of Ed. Um, there is too many things that happen at the state level, that they have no idea what we are doing down here in the trenches basically. Everything from cutting administrative costs to giving back surplus. Yeah, I had a zero local tax increase last year and now I have to give back twelve and a half cents back out of my surplus to the community, which is mandated. Cutting administrative costs or capping administrative costs, capping your budget at 2.5 growth when you've got salary at 4% next year. Those are the challenges. Whether you are big or small, it doesn't matter. You have to do the same amount of work as a superintendent. You know, we all have the same responsibilities whether it is NCLB or it's the fall report or DRTA and all those things. It is just a bureaucratic paper trail that makes it difficult because it takes up more time and takes you away more from the kids and what you really want to do as a chief school administrator is be in the classroom and be with the teachers and be with the kids. So those are the challenges. I think the regionalization issue is a big one. There are districts that probably need to because when you have a non-operating school district, like there are a few in South Jersey like Corbin City. It doesn't make a whole lot of sense to have a board of ed. in a non-operational school district. But what I think they need to do when you look at the regionalization issue, you can't look and make a blanket statement. You need to look at schools independently. Do I need to regionalize? No, not right now. Does a district near me might need to because of financial reasons, probably. Um, but that becomes a whole other gamut. So the I think the challenges are making the awareness. Nobody knew where Folsom was before Choice. In the past four years, I have made a concerted effort and a lot of other people to make the people

in the state government know we are here. And it wasn't just because of Choice, it was because we were successful and we're small and if you have a successful small school district, then let people know it is out there and show them that you don't need to regionalize.

Yes, District AB really wanted to grab this district, the district next door. I mean there were all kinds of rumors; they were going to make us a Special Ed. School and put all the Special Ed. kids here. There was a lot of talk because financially we were close; I mean there wasn't a whole lot of District K left because we didn't know where we were going to get the resources. You can't tap these taxpayers too much. I think the first year Christy was in office, I think she had a whole regionalization plan and then she tried to do it and she realized it wasn't going to fly so they just dropped it and let it go. The thing is that is why McGreevey opened it back up. They never took it off the books so it is still there.

Yeah, we try to bus every student. We bus every one of our kids. The Choice students, we bus probably 95% of them and then the other ones, because they are outside of twenty miles, we pay aid in lieu of or the parents transport them here.

Respondent #3

I think we have to wear more hats. We have less people to rely on. Currently, we have three administrators, the Business Administrator, a Vice Principal, and myself. So that is what runs the whole school district. So not only do we run this building, but we run the articulation with Princeton and then we also have a board that we are accountable for. So we do the whole gamut. We have all the same state reports that everybody else has to do, so we have a central office and a building to run. We have all that in one to do. So I think the challenge is to balance all of those things and still stay active involved with the children which is our prime goal, be out in the building, to get in the classes to see them and to handle the issues as they come up to continue to build the partnerships that we have. You just can't let them lie, you have to work on them on a daily basis and be involved in the community. So I think our time is stretched. I have to have good management skills and good organizational skills to be able to accomplish everything. But I think that we are moving along fine in that direction. This year for the first time we have a supervisor of instruction that is why I needed a part-time math teacher because she was a math teacher. She is teaching part-time and we've designated her task this year to work with all the non-tenure teachers to make sure that they get the support and guidance that they need and we felt that as we were growing as a staff from 25 to 30 staff members to up to almost 90 staff members now that there just wasn't enough among the Vice Principal and the Chief School Administrator to be able to provide the service and the level we expected to be provided.

IN YOUR TIME IN THE DISTRICT, HAS THERE EVER BEEN ANY THREAT TOWARDS POSSIBLY CONSOLIDATING DISTRICT B OR REGIONALIZE WITH ANOTHER SCHOOL DISTRICT?

The township does not want to do that. They are adamant that they want their own school. They have had graduation here since 1896. The township town hall was here as the initial school building built in 1896, which we had sold to the township for \$1 and they've done preservation on it. That is where our business office is housed over there. The rest of the building was built in 1949, '57, '67, '97 and 2003. So that is what I talk about when we said the core facility keeping it together and trying to make it work. We talked about in '97 making another school

and we decided that we didn't want to do that. We also didn't have land and the complex was sort of in the center of the village and so we didn't want people to be choosing where they had to go. So, we've added on. We walk more than a quarter of a mile around the building. It was a quarter mile in '97 and we put 30,000 square foot with the 2003 addition, so I don't know how much more that is. I haven't put a pedometer on yet.

Respondent #4

They've considered that for many years. District C is unique in that they are the only school district in the county that does not send to a the county regional high school. They established a sending receiving relationship with the District T Board of Education, which is in the next county. So the District C students when they graduate, they don't go onto our regional high school, the central high school. They go onto District T. Now there are benefits and there are negatives to that. Let me start with the benefits. One of the biggest benefits is District T is one of the 30 Abbott districts meaning that they get supplemental aid from the Department of Education so the supplemental aid they have is utilized to build the new high school, provide all sort of remediation instruction so the children in District C benefit from that. The downside of it is that in the interim while they are building the new high school, they have over 70 trailers that are housing these kids. So the District C Township is divided. I would say that if you polled them half of people would say that they would prefer sending to a school district in The county for high school and the other half would like the idea of sending to District T because there kids do benefit from this extra aid that they are getting because District T is an Abbott district. Another thing that is unique about District C is, we are a School Choice district. I don't know if you are familiar with School Choice. We are a Choice district and that helps to generate about \$192,000 a year. If we didn't have that \$192,000 a year quite frankly I don't know how we would have financially survived. The \$192,000 reflects about 26 School Choice students that come to us for the most part from District C from District W from District K. That really helps us and it is interesting when Commissioner Hespe was the Commissioner back in 2003 he did a visit to District C because it was a School Choice and asking the parents of School Choice and the students what they liked about District C compared to their home district. The reason they liked District C was because of the size of it that it was small and you got to know all of your classmates and you were encouraged to establish relationships with friends in fourth grade that were reinforced in the fifth all the way to graduation. So some people like it. Some people prefer the bigger the size the better the quality of program that they can provide.

Respondent #5:

When I first took this job, I thought wow, 87 kids piece of cake, but we do the exact same as a larger school district with less personnel. Our numbers are smaller, but all the reports, character ed., NCLB, and QAAR. Every one of those reports still has to be done and I'm not complaining by any means because I like doing them and it's a learning experience for me, but I am responsible to do all those things. Curriculum revision, everything soup to nuts. A principal of a small school has much more experiences than a principal of a larger district. My responsibilities were not as varied when I was a vice-principal of a large middle school.

Respondent #6:

I would assume it's related to finances.

Respondent #7:

Well, the biggest obstacle right now is financial.

Respondent #8:

The obvious is the finances.

Respondent #9:

I think the big issue is transportation because we don't have busing. They don't have busing; then don't have buses. You can see you'd need transportation. There are community leagues.

So, that yeah, the parents can provide the transportation outside the school day. But of our extra curricular activities are the school year book and the students actually made it. One of the things that Todd talked about that I wanted to pick up on is that typically institutional change takes a long time, but when you're running a small school, you can make changes in curriculum a lot quicker.

Respondent #9:

The biggest headaches are external forces. Um, right now it is at the state level. So, we have typically a very small administrator and secretarial staff and they just keep piling on more and more initiatives. Now you have to test for asbestos. Now you have to test for radon. Now you have to do test integration plan. Now you have to do the staff development plan. Now you have to do the Comprehensive Equity Plan. So they just keep piling it on all these initiatives, all these reports while at the same time putting up these all these budgetary restrictions. Last year they hit us up with the administrative costs after our budgets had already been approved by the boards, right on the eve of the budgets going out to the community. So there wasn't really any time to be, if they are truly trying to reduce costs and not just be punitive, then they would have been working with us you know a whole six months, eight months, and a year in advance. And say look, this is an issue that we're concerned about hiding administrative costs or inefficiencies in districts, that's going to come back and sort of work with districts, if they are truly trying to lower that. To me the way it was done was either as punitive or they don't have their act together at the state level, which I'm willing to bet. Um, if our taxpayers are paying an undue burden, then that needs to be looked at, but let's work at it together proactive. When it just comes down to mandate, like this new bill that he backed is retroactive to April. It is really hard to have these retroactive.

Respondent #10:

Or programmatic. For example, I was in a huge school district and they were talking about full-day kindergarten program. It was a six-year endeavor just to investigate the facilities and staffing implications. I came on board and implemented full-day kindergarten and an after-school program within three months of me being there. So I went from this huge district that was constantly fighting for full-day kindergarten, times eleven schools, times eleven facilities. It just never got done. It's still not done four years later, even though they decided they want to do it. Where I came at the right time at the right place and had space to do it, and a full-day kindergarten curriculum was implemented within six months. And an after-school program, the community wanted an after-school program. We brought three people in to describe their after-school program. The Board of Education voted on it within three board meetings and we had it

for the following September. So, when you talk about getting through all the red tape, you're it. If you have a good idea and you believe in it and think it is good for kids, you can get that right through.

Respondent #10:

Yes, that 1701 is a big topic for small schools right now. We actually, all three of us, have been penalized for being proactive in financial planning from a three to five year perspective to have enough money in surplus that if you receive a special ed student. We are actually being punished for doing that and are having that money taken away. That is just our interpretation from small schools. So I think the biggest for sure globally, the biggest challenge of small schools is to survive financially and when Todd says you beg, borrow, and steal for money, you beg, borrow, and steal for money. Well, beg, borrow, and work with the ed. foundation. Yes, we steal from the ed. foundation. They work very hard also to be a fund-raiser and that helps. We are able to bring in, you know, a wireless technology lab to our building. Not because of the state finance budget, but because of ed foundation who sells art and auctions off things and writes us a check to do that. So you have to be creative in forming partnerships and collaboration with all types of organizations. We have a great ed foundation that is very active in fundraising in our community and since District I is an artistic community, they are able to auction off original artwork on the Delaware with specific artists that live in town and who donate these pictures and you know, they are going for thousands at a time. That is complete profit to the ed. foundation. The ed. foundation then takes this money and sets up a grant program where teachers can write grants for creative curriculum pieces that extend beyond the curriculum and are able to fund very unique initiatives. So, we have a rock-climbing wall in our gymnasium for physical education program. I talked about the wireless computer lab and it goes on and on with small projects as well. That has been a main source for us to really tap into. We have funds that our 2.5% cap from the state isn't even going to cover our salary increases with the teachers, as well as our health benefit increase. So, we are trying to maintain small class sizes and still be creative in terms of the curriculum. So, we need additional revenues coming in those areas and that has helped us tremendously. So, it is a big puzzle that you try to get as creative as possible.

Respondent #11:

And if you think of the nature of a small school and the administrative costs related to that, the per pupil administrative cost is naturally going to be larger. There are fewer kids. You look at Flemington-Raritan and it is extraordinarily low because there are so many children. You look at us and it is pretty high. It doesn't mean we are top heavy with administrators. It is not apples and oranges.

Respondent #12:

Resources. Primarily staff and money; state money, not local taxpayers money. Partly it is a systemic problem in New Jersey in my mind and that is with the way schools are funded. Schools traditionally in New Jersey are a state responsibility, however they are not funded as a state responsibility. The recent surveys that I've seen indicate that New Jersey pays about 37% of funds for the schools in New Jersey where other states it's 49%. So there is a 12% gap just from us to the average in the United States, not what it should be and that is huge. That gets passed onto the local taxpayer. The local taxpayers' property taxes go through the roof. That's

an historic problem in New Jersey. This system continues to contribute to that and it has to change. So I understand the funding crisis. I understand the current economical situation, but it doesn't make it easier for us to run a school. 1701 is another huge challenge to us. We normally keep between 5% and 6% in surplus. Districts had to keep between 3 and 6%. You couldn't go below three and we did that consciously because we had such a small budget. We only have a \$4 million dollar budget and to have a surplus of a couple hundred thousand dollars wasn't extraordinary, but was necessary for us. If we needed to get something done, if we had an out of district Special Ed. placement. Any of these things and people move into town all the time, where would we find the money that's not budgeted for? So that fact that now our cap or surplus is reduced to 3%, it's going to have a huge impact. Not so much this year, but down the road the next few years. The cap at 2.5% that's another issue going down to 2%. I don't know how we're going to develop, or any other school for that matter, a budget that's going to fit that not when you've got teachers' contracts, health benefits going up 20%, fuel costs going up, insurance costs, busing costs going up. How do you do all of that in the 2.5% cap? That is the challenges that we wrestle with all the time and that's why it's so important we develop the relationships not just with the community, but other districts. We partner and share a music teacher with another district that supports them as an employee. We want to keep a good quality person, but we don't have a full-time job but if you partner with somebody then we are able to provide a full-time position for someone and it might be good to keep the continuity in that position. Those are the kinds of things that we do. All of our regional curriculum is done with our cluster group District H, District I, District J and District K. The last several years we've really fostered the curriculum revision and really staff articulation between those four schools. So what we do is we try to tap into small flavor and get the assets from a larger school district because when you pull all of us we become a large district and now we are able to tap the resources. We share professional development opportunities after school where we provide a free pass to anybody that we're running here from those districts. They'll do the same for us. So again we get the biggest bang for our buck for staff and professional development. Those are just some of the examples, but they are done in all areas of the operations here and they have to because we have a finite amount of money and we don't want to raise taxes and we try very hard not to but we do have a responsibility first and foremost to provide a quality education to our students and we take that very seriously.

Respondent #13:

I think that is what he was responding to. Number 5 what comes to mind when I look at that is the general obstacle is a public relations problem especially when the state governor is not supportive of education. Although they'll tell you differently. I will tell you with 30 years worth of managerial and financial fiscal responsibility; I pretty much know the difference between a nice financial plan and something that is a hodge-podge. S1701 was a hodge-podge. It was politically motivated strictly to give a one-year tax rebate so that people could be re-elected. Long term it has very severe consequences. It's very ill informed and anybody taking a graduate course in financial management and failed the course if they ever suggested issuing 20 year bonds to pay the grocery bill for the current year's budget gap. I mean it makes no fiscal responsibility at all. Not only that it starts with the state itself. We have a very nice gentleman that comes to every one of our board members, senior citizens who is on our side and he is so frustrated because he writes to Trenton and everything. He's very supportive of small schools

and he is saying look at Michigan, you know, I won't go through the litany, you have already gone through the research the state of New Jersey is either 44th or 45th in support of education and they won't take the action that is needed to do the funding. To figure out a way to fund it either through general revenues, through income tax, I don't know what but certainly property tax everybody agrees is not the answer. The other problem is that the state law says that they should fund at a certain level. They haven't. They haven't for years. Our state funding has changed very, very little over the last two year budgets that I've been involved in and it's been flat and I see the graphs prior to that and it's been flat so I mean if the state funding doesn't go up and salaries as they need to if you want to attract good staff then what is going to go up? Property taxes are going to go up. I mean what magic is that you know. Yeah, duh you know property taxes are going to go up.

Respondent #14:

Uh, please. Jim McGreevey, he came up with a weird formula. You know everybody doesn't want to have to pay a lawyer, but sometimes you do and to put in the cost of photocopying that you use for the entire school and to put in the cost of auditors, which is required by state law. They just make it look as though schools are extremely wasteful and top heavy in terms of administration. I would like to walk Jim Gerheart through my school one day, because 101.5 is extremely irritating because he is not interested in answers. He is only interested in complaining, hype. He irritates me and people believe him because he has the bully pulpit. The fact of the matter is that all costs involving schools are not necessarily going to administrators. When you look at the cost of healthcare that has gone up an inordinate amount in a number of years and you can't negotiate over that. Try to take people's health benefits away from them. It is not going to happen. I can remember one year, as the superintendent, being astounded that my health benefits went up 35% in one year. What else goes up 35% that you say, you know what, I can do without this product. You can't do that with healthcare, because then you wouldn't have a work force. When you look at the moral issues involved with people being able to have healthcare, I think it is a much larger issue that comes back and bites schools districts in the political realm. And I think it is a political issue as opposed to more financial issues. Nobody talks about the increase in the cost of healthcare and I used to try to contain in the district until I realized, you know what, no matter what you do, costs go up every year. The cost of a gallon of milk went up considerably last year, just as the cost of a gallon of gasoline. I have to buy gasoline for my trucks. I have to buy milk for the kids. Those costs go up and I have to provide for that and am I going to be able to keep a two and a half percent cap as 1701 proposes? That I think is going to be the death now of small schools in New Jersey and I'd rather the administration say to the taxpayers of New Jersey, you know, small schools are just not efficient and we are going to force regionalization as they did in Pennsylvania ten years ago. If that is what you really believe, then have the guts to stand up and say it, rather than pussy footing around and making these schools bleed to death financially.

Respondent #16:

Well I guess of course the biggest one is money. That is always an issue. In a small school you want to provide everything that a large district has, but you can't always do that. Although we have maintained every program there is to have, we have always had art, music. We teach world languages from K through 8. Everybody gets French. There isn't anything we don't have and

we have done it through good fiscal management that we are able to provide all that for our kids. But, money is always an issue.

Respondent #17:

I think the consolidation it was interesting that throughout the years in my tenure, both the borough and the township schools were fairly small communities and they had K through 12 schools. Not K through 12 schools, but they had facilities for K through 12, so they both were running their high schools and I think that the pressure for both of the communities to consider consolidation or regionalization was really at the high school level. The reason was program because you had two very affluent communities right there and so you have well educated parents and their expectations about the level of education and their expectations about advanced classes and a variety of classes and of course with a small population, you can't afford to offer some of those things or you offer them, but it is extremely expensive. I think at one point C township was offering Japanese or Italian or something and there were only a couple of kids in the class and it's just not fiscally possible to continue to do that. So that was the crux of the problem fielding high school teams was another problem, that constant struggle of getting a whole football team on the field was ridiculous so that was a secondary consideration. So I think that the pressure was on because of the high school basically and I have to say that in my experience in C when we regionalized, it was the third vote proposal for regionalization that the two towns had gone through. I think that they in the past had approached each other back and forth and I think that they came to each other at one point and one community said yes and the other community said no and then years later the other community approached the other and it was put up for a vote and the opposite thing happened. The other community said yes and the one said no, so I think that that is because of the concept of home rule. People want control over their schools and because the two towns were so close to each other, there was also that feeling of rivalry. So although it is a natural to take your neighbor and try to consolidate with them, there's also that inherent rivalry, those kids from C or those kids from C. So you had that. I think a little bit of that was playing into it, but finally the fiscal and the program issues were big enough and were able to be understood enough that both of the communities voted to regionalize and why they decided to regionalize K through 12 I don't know.

CB: USUALLY HIGH SCHOOLS TEND TO BECOME REGIONALIZED.

Respondent #17:

Right, and that would have solved the problem and truthfully, between you and me and anyone else who is going to hear this, the elementary schools never really regionalized. I mean in name we had one board of education and one budget for the district, but these communities schools were still in the same place with the same principals with the same population so you had to three elementary schools and I have to tell you that truthfully, the programs were never consolidated and probably if I went back today it is probably not there.

CB: HOW DID THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CONFIGURE? DID IT GO TO ONE MIDDLE SCHOOL?

Respondent #17:

They went to one middle school and took over the physical plant that used to be one of the high schools and when there was such overcrowding years later and there was talk of creating another elementary school, because the elementary schools were either K through four, K through five or sometimes K through six, when it got so crowded there was a proposal to create a fourth elementary school and the dreaded r word redistricting was so heinous to so many people, that we wound up creating another transition. We created a four-five school rather than a fourth K through whatever school and honestly, I have to say I was against it at the time, because I thought here are these kids who have to go through another transition. The fourth and fifth grades are very unique and they have very unique needs and these kids are really, you know they are not elementary and they're not middle school kids and it has worked out extremely well, extremely well. But now, there is overcrowding again and now there is talk again, what are we going to do? Are we going to take that four-five school and make it another elementary school and remove that four-five from the configuration. I'm glad I'm not there for that.

CB: SO THAT NOW BECOMES ANOTHER PROBLEM DOWN THE ROAD?

Respondent #17:

It is actually here now and I mean I don't know what they are going to decide. They have already done some redistricting because of the populations, but in a small school you do have those stresses too of the redistricting. You know if you are a small school and you are under capacity, what happened at the school that I was in was we were very small. We wound up not overcrowded and it was the only school that was not overcrowded. We wound up getting a lot of the Special Ed. classes, which was great for the Special Ed. kids, but because many of them are in Special Ed. classes but also mainstreamed, in so many things because our population of non-Special Ed. kids was so small at times, the Special Ed. population was overwhelming because they were just such a big proportion, a big percentage so that has its own problems, but I have to say that those kids coming from the largest elementary school coming to our school they just got so much special attention and nurturing and a feeling, even though they were across town, they really flourished in that school. I would say without any exceptions. It was an excellent transition for them.

Respondent #18:

Well it is going to impact on the administrative issue greatly because I am the only administrator here. I am the superintendent and the principal. We have a business administrator, but then anyone else that I would need as a resource such as curriculum also has to teach. Our Special Ed. also has to teach. Our technology person also has to teach. The person that's in charge, my lead teacher when I'm gone, of course also has a class, but you wear many hats when you are here. Whereas in a larger district, I think you would be able to have different people for each of those positions and flexibility.

Respondent #19:

Well, I think one of the challenges is manpower or personnel because you can't support any fluff. There is no redundancy in a small school. The people that you hire are the people who are actually needed to carry out the job. Here I think because of the size, you can hire and share ancillary staff because you have a large population you might have Basic Skills. You might have some enrichment; some ESL and those teachers might be multiplied certified so you can use

them more. Whereas in a small school, everyone is identified and everyone is working. So one of the other challenges of a small school is to find talented and willing volunteers to do some of the things that you might here have professionally certified people.

Respondent #20:

It is hard to be everything to everybody. Um, a superintendent in the county said it best and I never heard it better, she said my board wants me to be a principal during the day and a superintendent at night. That's a very interesting comment because the board and the community expects like I'm out at bus duty and parents see that. There's a big public relations piece with this. You know people are paying salaries and expect a certain service. So they want you to be visible. They want you to be in the classroom and by they I mean any of the constituents, board members, community members, teaching staff. You've have to get the paperwork down. You need to find the grants. You need to do all that, but you are expected to be out with the kids and see those are expectations that I have for myself too. I'm actually the hardest person on me. I'm expected to be in the classrooms. I'm expected to make sure the curriculum and instruction is all running and to do the observations, the schedules to make sure all those intricate things. You know parents say, why do you work during the summer? They have no idea that that's why the school year runs as it is supposed to. The pre-active and pro-active things that you do um, but then you are expected to be at the land use meeting this evening, there are board meetings. I am expected to really, the preference is to get the paperwork done after hours and I try very hard to do that because I want the kids to see me. There are certain times of the year that you are inundated with paperwork and it is almost humanly impossible, but that is the best way I have heard it said. The board wants me to be a principal during the day and a superintendent at night. I have the added piece of running the Child Study Team and not just on paper. I am the coordinator/director so I sit and I meet with the Child Study Team and we make decisions about students etc. When I first came, the principal that was here did it and I had a strong Special Education background as well and I had some concerns operationally about how it was being done. It is under the job description of the assistant principal. However in a district this small, often times you see as one of the obstacles the second person, and I will use the word command, is usually the one that changes it is like a stepping stone. So I had a new assistant principal the second year I was here and there was no background in Special Education and I wanted to make sure that things got corrected so I took charge then. Then he left to go some place else and I had someone brand new last year who had no background in Special Education at all and again I mean I can gradually teach someone, but I can't, it is too important to just put over to someone. I can't have mistakes made and those kinds of decisions that so greatly impact children. So when you are training a new assistant, if they don't have any background in curriculum and instruction or in all those pieces, there is a huge learning curve. So um, the Special Education piece I took last year as this person was learning and quite honestly is still not ready for it this year. So its something that has just been on my plate and it needs to be someone who is consistent. You know, I have thought about someone on the Child Study Team do it and that certainly is a possibility, perhaps next year and that takes a huge chunk of time out. Most districts have somebody else and that's another piece that when you are one person you have to everything to everybody and especially when you have the personality where you want everything as close to perfect as it can be. Everything that happens here is a reflection of me, so no matter who I delegate to, if there is a problem ultimately it falls here. So that is a challenge.

Respondent #20:

Absolutely, there was a regionalization study done when I first came. I came in 2001 in July and the year prior to that they had gotten a grant to do a regionalization study with the District R cluster. District P would have lost big time because the tax rate would have gone up tremendously with what they would have had to pay for regionalization. So there was no reason to do it. I think District K would have lost also. White would have come out OK and District R would have benefited greatly, but District K and District P really would have lost out because the community would have had to pay so much and our community wouldn't want that. They like that they know the person who controlling the school and making the cause because they know that they know their kids. So the regionalization study happened and then it was done. Right now we are waiting for what happens with this land use board and then we will have an ad hoc committee about facilities and District R will too because there is an impact that will happen there.

CB: SO THEY WILL HAVE TO INCREASE THEIR FACILITY AS WELL?

Respondent #20:

Absolutely because right now they are using a piece of the high school and we are a sending district there so any increase here they will absorb and they have their own District R home students using the middle school for most of the day and not using the elementary school. So if additional enrollment at District R High School happens, then those seventh and eighth graders will be displaced. They will have to go back to the elementary school. That will become overcrowded, so they'll have to look at what they'll have to do for their facilities. Costs will go up at the high school, which will be divvied out, to all the cluster districts. So everybody will have an increase. So it's not just District P with the development. There's a lot of that trickling down that will happen in many other places.

Respondent #21:

Well, I don't think there is anything more than what I have already shared about being very creative in finding resources for your school. District Q provided our kids with a good high school education and many went on and still go on to top colleges and universities. It provided kids with a great opportunity to build their resumes to go onto college and I'm sure colleges take into consideration where you've gone in high school so our kids do well.

Question 6

What are the financial obstacles administrators face in running a small school?

a. How important is controlling non-teaching positions toward efficiency?

Respondent #1:

Again, this comes back to the creativity. They have to utilize the resources available to them more and they have to share their resources with other schools. I have clients that share music teachers, art teachers, and in some instances they utilize outside services. For example, the Ed. Services Commissions where the Ed. Services Commission will hire an employee and provide

benefits for that employee as a full time employee and some districts will hire them on a two day a week, three day a week situation thereby reducing their costs and sharing that particular person with other schools.

Respondent #1:

Uh, the only problem that the districts would have is not having a full time person in house at all times. For example, if you have a business administrator doing more than one school, that person will have to be out of the school for various number of hours for the day and week. So that person will not be in house at all times. What is does do is created the hiring of more of the lower echelon people, the clerks, etc. Obstacles can be overcome though.

Respondent #1:

The um, recent legislation that you are referring to was passed early on in July of 2004. The intent of the legislation is to supposedly give tax relief to the citizens of the state of New Jersey by limiting the amount of money that school districts are allowed to spend and they are also limiting the amount of surpluses that school districts are able to maintain. The difficulties of the new law are the allowed increases the budget appropriations are terribly limited. They are projecting a 2 ½ % increase in allowed appropriations in succeeding years. The only problem with that is that they are failing to recognize the contractual requirements that schools have far exceed the 2 ½ % for teacher salaries. The fringe benefits are increasing much more than 2 ½ %. They are ignoring the fact that a school budget is prepared in the fall, winter, and spring prior to the start of the school year in excess of 9 months prior to the school year starting. There are too many unknowns at that time in order to properly prepare a budget. According to state statute, they have to prepare that budget that early on in order to go in front of the voters. They are limiting surpluses as far as the amount of money that has to be held in reserve for emergency situations. Many times emergencies crop up that are unanticipated and they often don't have the funds available to pay for it. Uh, they are restricting the amount of lead way that school districts will have as far making budget transfers. Emergency type appropriations have to be approved at the county superintendent of schools level. There will be many hardships and the only relief that they're going to receive in taxes in my estimation is going to be the current year. But in the meantime, they're going create a lot of hardships to the schools. So in order to improve taxes, they're going to create a lot of hardships at the school level and probably not destroy, but weaken the educational system in Jersey.

Respondent #1:

It is going to be a push toward consolidation, but it hasn't been determined yet the benefits of consolidation. They might be saving money in some areas, but they are going to create costs in other areas. Transportation costs will increase. Some administrator costs will increase. Um, class sizes will increase. So the consolidations may not benefit education in my estimation in any rate. I think it could probably weaken it.

Respondent #2:

We have an educational foundation that was established before I got here. In fact I didn't ever realize I was the executive director until I signed my contract. They said, by the way you're the executive director and you have a golf tournament to do in two months. They have been very, very good. We have been struggling the past year trying to figure out how to raise money. The

golf tournament is done; it has run its course. But they have been good about giving money to the teachers when they write mini grants for leadership trips, summer programs. We have taken the kids to the Ocean Life Center and out in the water for science experiments. The foundation funded the first year I brought Stokes here. We take the sixth grades to Stokes State Forest for three days and two nights and now they still fund 50% of it. It is a good resource with the new facility coming; we will use the foundation if people want to make donations. If people want to give me \$50,000 to put a plaque in the library, that's great. We'll run it through the foundation, so it's got a lot of value.

CB: WITH REGARD TO CHOICE, HOW WERE THE DISTRICTS ACTUALLY DETERMINED?

Respondent #2:

Well, number one you had to show the need. You had to show that you had seats available. That was number one, but the other piece was more programmatic. Our big selling point here was we were going to keep class sizes at 23 at the middle and 21 at the elementary and we are still at that and we're going to have a little impact. I mean if get a family of move in it is going to have a little impact during the school year, but we have been able to maintain small class sizes. That was a big one. Small school setting for us. Big school districts like Kenilworth. Kenilworth is a regional district and they had a lot of open seats at their high school, so they wanted to make a Choice district out of it. You have District R. All the different districts had their reasons and what the state did was look at the application and what they had was some kind of checklist or criteria that you had to meet and if you met it then you got approved.

Respondent #3:

Well, District B is an affluent district and they have really supported the school. People move into the district for the school. Our tax base because of the town fathers is low; one of the lowest in our county because they are putting warehouses on the other side of 130. They are preserving the building so the master plan has allowed the growth of enrollment to be slow while the growth of industry to support the school to grow much faster. So their tax increase is really not as you might think it would be so they have tried to balance both of those out. They've also purchased a lot of land and put it in farmland preservation. So we are not going to get that booming growth that the towns around like the three towns south of here have felt. We're not getting an influx of 100 kids every year. We've getting an influx of maybe 25 kids a year so we have small growth so we can absorb them in more easily and we can plan for them. So I think that the financial obstacles are not as large as they would be if we were just growing rapidly and we were not getting industry built on top of it. So I think the town father have just done a wonderful job with that. So I'm trying to think what the taxes went up last year. It wasn't a whole lot. I can't put a figure on it. We do this in house. We do all of our desktop publishing and we give it to a printer to print for us. So an average house in District B is around 2,500 they went up \$50 to \$60 last year for an increase in the budget, which is minimal, maybe a cup of coffee. We had a 3% increase with 21 kids at the elementary and four kids at the high school. Our regional high school tuition is almost \$14,000 per child so one time we increased 20 kids at the high school and the budget really soared that year like \$150,000 more and one-third of it was just for tuition. So I think the finance committee of the board, the board functions with committees so there are

three members on it; the board president, they, and us really have a pulse on the community. We know we have a lot of senior citizens and we want to keep things down, but if we can show them quality and we are not increasing that much, nine times out of ten we are going to get the support on the budget that we have. The year before, we went up 15.75% and we thought that it would be difficult and we passed that. So the Princeton enrollment came to 55.49% of the budget and we have no control over that and so the rest was just the elementary and that year it went up substantially and it still passed.

Respondent #4:

Such as aids and custodial workers. Well, that's a problem. It's a problem, because if you have classified students that require an aid that's your budget and you are always mindful of your budget, but when you are an administrator, you have to think about providing a thorough and efficient education for each and every student and by law that is your responsibility. So if a youngster comes to you and in his IEP it requires that he or she is required to have an aid or they need to have supplemental instruction, you have to find the money to do that and in finding the money to do that it often times causes you not to be able to do something. A perfect example is our cafeteria was in serious need of repair. Unfortunately, we had a couple of Special Education children who moved into our district that their IEP required that additional aids that required additional money, which just made the cafeteria project be put on the back burner. So you don't always have the flexibility of maintaining your building the way you would because you have to provide by law this thorough and efficient education and as you know, every seven years the Department of Education will come out to monitor your Special Education program. We went through a self-assessment, which in essence you are assessing your own Special Education program and then you send that report off to the DOE and then they take a look at that report and they send in a team of monitors to take a look at if the information that you sent to them was factual. So we went through that experience last year and we came through the process with some minor they call it a corrective action plan your CAP. These were some minor corrections that we had to address, but nothing major, but once again it becomes a matter of what you can afford and develop a priority list. Fortunately, we worked with a tremendous PTO out there. Our Board of Education was really supportive and we all worked like a team to promote our budget and convince the taxpayers and the voters that would ultimately vote on our budget that it was a fiscally responsible budget and they could see that. I mean we didn't waste any money out there. I mean we had one head custodian. A lot of people would donate their time. A lot of our teachers would come in at 7:30 in the morning to provide remediation and weren't reimbursed for this. So you have to work with the players that you are given and it can become rather challenging at times.

Respondent #5:

You have to look and be creative, look elsewhere. Luckily we have vendors in town, companies like the Marriott to look to for assisting us through either a grant or because they are in town to help the schools out. We send out student council people to develop relationships where they even the local stores will donate and you have to keep a tight budget.

Respondent #6:

I would assume it's related to finances. I think finance would, I could have had a half-time nurse who would be half time in another building, but you could justify it, but the parents were just so

adamant about a full time nurse because they said, oh he can only be sick in the morning since the nurse is not here in the afternoon or he'll fall and break his leg and who will be there you know, even though it was five minutes away. So, the demands to give services might be greater than would be necessary. In other words, the demand because the culture says well we need a full time art teacher, or we need a full time music teacher and so you would tend to be spending a dollar more than you would normally if you were just scheduling the kids.

Respondent #6:

That is the critical element. The most critical element is controlling non-teaching positions. I cut 60% of my administrative positions and the scores went up because of the provincial ness of the supervisors in different schools. They take three science supervisors two junior high, senior high. They really weren't cooperative. They had their own faculties and they didn't always work and cooperate. So when one would retire, I would say to the other two, you do his job. When two would retire, I'd say we'll have good articulation, because you've got nobody else and the scores went up. So I saved two salaries and I didn't lose anything as far as the student performance goes. I feel the non-teaching personnel is the biggest problem and that goes for janitors and you know, cafeteria, and drivers. There is a whole array, but mostly, and I would not touch instruction. I wouldn't sacrifice anything that has to do directly with classroom teachers. With me it was always with non-classroom teachers who are supervisors.

Respondent #7:

Well, the biggest obstacle right now is financial. You know the state now is really penalizing small schools, the small districts. In order to be able to survive, you have to be very creative and districts are looking at creative ways in order to run their systems and still maintain the qualities that they have. I am in a district right that is presently doing that. They are taking a look at themselves and saying what can we do to be efficient; to be able to address the constraints that the state is imposing upon us and at the same time to continue to provide the quality education that the parents are looking for in the community and that the kids deserve. And this is an issue that is affecting many small districts that are in the state of New Jersey. I feel that if we don't find a solution to that, we are going to lose a tremendous asset and the asset is that small is better. I really feel that small is better and there has to be a way in order to find a common ground. Most people who have worked in small districts and I have worked in both. I've worked in large districts. I've worked in urban districts. I worked in small districts. I think small districts really make a big difference in all kids lives, not just the kids who are at the top and not just the kids that are on the bottom, which are required by law and required by pressure that comes from parents, but the kids that are in the middle seem to profit a great deal. So in summary I think that there has got to be a way to have both is able to survive.

CB: CAN YOU GIVE SOME EXAMPLES OF THE FINANCIAL OBSTACLES THAT ADMINISTRATORS FACE?

Respondent #7:

Well, the administrative penalty right now. If you have the ratio between the administration and the students reaches a certain point, the state is going to penalize you financially. All of the regulations, this is a very highly regulated state. Some of which comes down from the federal

government. I mean the whole No Child Left Behind. All of the paperwork, all of the hoops that small districts have to go through requires administrative and clerical assistance. When you are small, it is really tough to provide those services and I think this is a good example of how small districts can be creative. Can they team up with other districts to have teaming of services? Can they share personnel? Can they share resources that they are using? I think there are things that the challenges also can provide some opportunities. And the opportunities can be what can we do in order to survive and at the same time provide a quality education in a small district? I mean District D, I come back again, did something very creative. They have a shared superintendent and a shared business administrator. At the same time, they provide a full-time principal to their small school and they saved money. They saved a considerable amount of money and while they did it, they also empowered the public and the public became much more supportive of the school system. So, I think there are a lot of ways that districts can approach this problem.

Respondent #8:

The obvious is the finances. You know, because we're not in an urban area, we don't receive a lot of state funding, so everything that we do is really based on the local taxes. We get a little bit of state aid, but not much and when state cuts the budget back, we are usually very affected by that. Then the taxes go up in the area, which concerns the people. So we have no control over raising those funds, yet the state caps our budget, which they do. We have to work within the means of the state and because we are smaller, there isn't a lot of wiggle room in our budget. So that is really the difficult. The most challenging part of my job is to try to make it work with less money every year and I feel that we are getting squeezed to the point where you know, we could all go away because of that.

CB: HOW ABOUT YOUR OPINION ON S1701?

Respondent #8:

It is a disaster. It is going to kill everybody. Hopefully it's going to be repealed or at least changed a little bit. You can't do more with less or even the same. It's killing everybody, not just us. Flemington has 3,000 kids and it's hurting them. I mean it's hurting every district.

Respondent #9:

The other thing that is an issue with this administrative costs, because this is what I was talking about with the budget last year. Um, there's no one who has been able to clearly define exactly what administrative cost is. The way that they calculate the administrative cost is the best that I can tell is this curious budget process formula that it includes your secretary, your copying costs, your technology, your attorney fees, all your board fees. It is a much bigger cost and what it doesn't take into account is that the administrator of a small school often plays multiple roles. For example, I am the No Child Left Behind grant coordinator. I am the Title IV coordinator. I am the school librarian and the custodian. I am the affirmative action coordinator. I am the staff development. I am the facilities manager. Well, it is just multiple responsibilities so being the administrator, there are a lot of different roles, but we don't calculate that budget wise the cost of all those people is lower than the state average. So, we must be viewed accommodating sufficiently in terms of significantly lower class sizes than the state average. So, you figure you must be doing something right, but they only look at that one little piece and it is calculated

according this budgetary formula, but might not necessarily be indicative of your actual circumstances.

Respondent #11:

I can't think of any others. The financial is a pretty large umbrella. Unfunded mandates and those kinds of things, I think Rich alluded to earlier. If we have a significantly handicapped child that we can't educate in our schools, you know, is \$60-\$70 thousand dollars. For us, that is a large percentage of our budget and like Suzanne says, we had to just give money back. You are only allowed to save a very small amount of money here and in Pennsylvania there is no limit for example. Because in my 26 years before here were in Pennsylvania. The state doesn't limit your amount of money you can save for a rainy day and they don't say all that has got to go back to the taxpayers. So, in a place like ours, a rainy day really hurts a lot more than in other places. It is difficult for us to have to deal with that.

Respondent #12:

We're still waiting for full funding on No Child Left Behind. We know it's not going to arrive. And it has to come from somewhere else in your budget, which impacts another program. So there is a domino affect. If we had a healthy surplus, we could absorb that in one year and it wouldn't be an issue. Plus for years and the business administrator has continued this, this district has been very, very frugal about taking money investing it in the future. If we had a surplus, most of it would go back to the taxpayer the next year anyway, which 1701 wants you to do. We have been doing that forever. The other portion of it would go the capital outlay so that we could keep things for the building. There are some things in building that need to be done. We have non-friable asbestos tiles under the rug. We can abate that. We can repave the parking lot. We can do that. If we need to replace a stonewall out here on a county roadway, we can do that. If we need to put new carpets down or new flooring down, we can do that without taking a referendum out and asking the taxpayer to give me more money when if we're smart and we save money correctly and we run a very tight budgets, build surpluses, we'll do what we need to do then everybody wins. Unfortunately, that all got changed with 1701.

CB: TO DOVETAIL ON THE IDEA OF CONSOLIDATION, HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONCERN OR THOUGHT ABOUT REGIONALIZING FOR YOUR DISTRICT?

Respondent #12:

They did a study in 2001 and that study indicated the two districts that would benefit financially were District J and District K, but District H and District I would not. You can't regionalize if two of your partners are going to have an increase. At the time and still to this day, the state does not provide any incentives to do that so if it is not educationally beneficial and it's not financially beneficial, then why would we then regionalize? Why would anybody regionalize? So that's been the latest one. I'm mean, there is always talk about it, but there's really been no movement to make it happen. Most of the districts don't want to do it. Not because they don't want to partner with somebody because we still do. We almost act like a district that is not regionalized and that is important. Not just for financial reasons, but it will also benefit our kids

and it does. I don't see that happening in the near future. It doesn't mean it won't. We want it to be so it doesn't happen to us by default and then make a decision and communicate

Respondent #12:

Very important. We feel that we have proper staffing. Other districts would love to have I have two office secretaries. One of them is full-time twelve months. The other is ten months, but they are also the Child Study Team secretaries, the attendance secretaries, and my personal secretary, free and reduced lunch application. They do a lot of the tasks that larger districts could farm out quasi-administrative people. We don't have those. They know more than most people who get paid twice their salary. DA's office is DA and he has an assistant business administrator who is really the board office secretary as well. Other districts our size don't have that. They may have one secretary and maybe a part-time person. We don't even know how we're getting everything done with the staff we staff we have and we consider ourselves relatively enlightened and relatively efficient. We're discussing this yesterday morning or last week I think. They don't do it. There are just things that they don't do and we have to make sure that if we're going to spend the money to hire people and have them here no matter how good they are that they district gets the benefit from that. We think the benefit we're getting from the extra staff or so to speak extra staff is beneficial and when we stop thinking that way then I need to make a recommendation to the board that we don't have the staff regardless of how good the staff is and we don't believe that. We think that we get more than our bang for the buck and the kids do because of the staff we have. So we have to look at them carefully the same as custodial staff, the same as with teacher aides. We've hired more teacher aides, but we've had kids who need the service. If we didn't have it, we'd have to put more kids out of district, not good financially, not good for the kids, not good for the parents, not good for the educational process. But there is a balancing act. You don't just hire an aide because you need another pair of hands. Again there is an educational and a benefit of effectiveness from the people that you hire. And our librarian, and our yearbook advisor. When you are a small school, people multi-task. And we do have a lot of days that he does that too.

Respondent #12:

We didn't hire an assistant principal. We lost our principal last year to another district. When I came I hired her as an assistant principal and truly had the skills to be the principal. So after my first year here I made her principal and I became the superintendent. She got offered a job making 50% more money closer to home. How do I tell her not to? She loved it here but you can't do that you know. So she leaves and we're going to hire an assistant principal because we know we can't offer a salary large enough to get a quality principal. The board and we all decided that we couldn't do that. We have some unanticipated expenses, 1701, this mold, out of district placement all happened. We could maybe do and hope for the best with the budget or we could just say, we're going to try to do without it this year. So we are. We've got two teachers working two periods a day each in our 7th and 8th grade. Because we just so happen to have two sections of seventh and eighth grade this year. With some holes in their schedule, we created the master schedule. They're handling some quasi-administrative tasks. One of them is handling testing and helping with curriculum. The other one is handling discipline and student activities and PTA liaison and I've hired an interim retired person two days a week to do some of the observations for me and the other stuff that needs to be done and to be in the building when I have to be in a meeting who knows where for the state or for the county, just to make sure there

is continuity here. So we're kind of doing it by committee and we're saving \$35,000, which is going to help us place a kid out of district without busting the budget. One-year deal and then we're going to try to get back on track again. Those are the kinds of decisions that we have to make. Other districts, they wouldn't even have to think about that. That just wouldn't even happen and just automatically absorb it and go on. With everything that happens to us has a major impact some place else and we have to be able to anticipate where that is, make a conscious choice of where that decision to the community and hopefully getting them to buy into the decision.

Respondent #13:

It's very frustrating. I love this job and I'm glad. I took a reduced salary. Believe me, a person who's business administrator for this school district is not going to get rich I'm telling you right now and I took a reduction to come here because I wanted to be a business administrator and I wanted also to be in a small district where I thought I could influence and make a difference with some of the background that I had. I'm still oriented that way but I will tell you that I'm very frustrated with the state's support. It's clear to me that they want to put small districts out of business. It is also equally clear because I'm looking around the geographic area. They want us all to regionalize. You know what the fault is in this state with property tax? It's the 600 and some small school districts that are out there right? Well guess what? The Turnpike Authority and the Parkway Authority were merged in state government right? How much did they save? Did you read the paper? Ok, good role model for small schools. Plus I happen to know of at least three regionals right now. The participating communities want to de-regionalize because they think they're getting ripped off in the regional scenario. So they want to go back to having their own high school, back to having their own middle school. You know I mean it's I don't know the right answer. All I know is we need a little more guidance from Trenton than we are getting.

Respondent #13:

In terms of financial obstacles, as Respondent #12 was saying it's tough. We have a small budget. We don't have very much lee way so if you have something that comes up that you haven't anticipated and you don't have the savings account for it, you can get into big trouble in a hurry and literary it is the law that we cannot operate in a deficit basis. Whatever we have in money is all we have to spend for the remainder of the year and if you get mold in your media center and we're already in to the tune of over \$20,000. So we haven't even begun the fixing process. That was not budgeted. \$20,000 to a little district like this is a lot of money.

Respondent #13:

Although the outcome of the study and he is more familiar than I am with it. You know, it is the property tax impact on the individual communities. Ok, it's fine it sounds like a good idea, but I'm not paying more.

Respondent #13:

Well, I support everything that he said and even if sometimes I feel sorry for myself, I can't afford another assistant because there are a lot of things that I would like to do. You know the

thing right now that we're especially at a disadvantage because one of our teachers is out on maternity leave and she is also our technology coordinator.

Respondent #13:

Yes, so Respondent #12 and I are here and we're each, although he is much better than I am in terms of technological astuteness, but they're coming to us and saying my disk crashed. How do I restore it? Ooh, an icon is not on my desktop, how do I restore that? Oops, can you reload my software. My TVator is working so I can't throw. Right now I feel guilty because I need to run over there. Yesterday I did nine computers in the lab just putting office icons on the desktops so that the students can click it because we just installed a new server. I really and I'm sitting here pretty honestly, I mean I probably not the faster person in the world and I'm no Einstein, but I'm not dumb and I'm not inefficient and I frankly don't know how I can do what I'm doing any better unless I just plain come here at 6:00 in the morning and go home at 9:00 at night I really don't.

Respondent #13:

A couple nights a week we have board meetings. You know they're 10:00 a couple nights a month. The reason it keeps you going is that it is fun. What's happening to us around here is you know, last summer, my first summer we had a lightening strike wipe out our fire alarm system, a number of computers. This year is the flood and mold, you know. What is next? What's going to happen to me in 2005? If we didn't have this going on, I would have a little more spare time.

Respondent #14:

They are really financial resources. We are currently dealing with an issue of state aid that we feel is insufficient. When I look at the five districts that feed into the high school, the average amount of state aid that they get is about 35% to 38%. We are getting anywhere from 13% to 17%. The difference lies in the fact that when you look at the income portion of the formula that is self-reported on the state income tax level, but it's non-specific as to where you live and it's determined by your zip code. Here in District L the zip code is ##### and that zip code, is shared by District L and District X, two very wealthy townships in comparison to us. Just to give you an indication of how wealthy District X is, a famous basketball star, who lives in a multi-million dollar house, reports ##### as his zip code, which means that the revenues from his multi-million dollar house and his taxes are figured into the state aid calculation here and we get far less here than they do in District X. I don't understand that. So, we are currently suing the state of New Jersey as a school district for additional state aid, because we feel that it is inaccurate as it applies to us. District M gets \$300,000 more in state aid than we do. So, that additional cost of \$300,000 would make things go a lot smoother here, especially when you look at excessive cost of special education in New Jersey and how we get hit with that. I have one autistic child that costs me in excess of \$100,000 and my entire budget is \$1.6 million dollars. So that is 10% of my budget for one child. We send this kid out of district. The aid in that district makes more than my beginning teachers do and I have no control over that cost. So, is there a situation where we are beginning to develop an area in New Jersey with the haves and have not? Yes, there is and parents here in District L are beginning to resent the fact that we put, in their opinion, excess dollars to meet the needs of children with learning disabilities at the expense of regular education children. To give you a case in point, we had five children

registered for kindergarten one year. It's cute on its face, but it raises a problem in that, how are you going to deal with those five children? Are you going to hire one teacher as a first grade teacher to deal with five children? Is it good for five children to be in one class? We determined that it was not, so we created a multi-age class of first and second grade with a total population of 19 youngsters. What happened is we had one teacher retire and the board saw that we were up against a considerable amount of money to spend in special ed. and we decided to go with the multi-age third and fourth grade class. Well, we did that so that we could also offer music, Spanish, computers, and phys ed. all with specialists that were coming in to teach those classes to kids. We will probably, if this trend continues, have the regular classroom teacher revert back to teaching the vocal music and phys ed as we did 35 to 40 years ago in some districts. But the community sees that as a step back and doesn't want to go that way. They want to have an instrumental music teacher. They want to have a Spanish teacher. They want to have what other districts have and because we have to make these hard decisions of the pie only growing 3% from year A to year B, we have to make internal adjustments and still the local property taxes go up. So, that is the biggest challenge of running a small district. You just don't have that extra flexibility in your budget to fund things as they do in other districts, however I've been in other districts and I know that it is not as rosy there as it appears. If your population remains stable as District L has for the past ten years, then it is not as much of a problem as if you are dealing with a district where the population is growing, like for example, Montgomery. I drove through there the other day on my way to a meeting in St. Elizabeth's and I was cutting the back way to 206 and went past, what I think is the new high school and I'm saying holy moly that is some plant that you are putting together there. But, just to provide for the additional kids moving in there and the increasing tax base on the basis of the number of new residents is not going to cover the cost, so how do you do it? I think New Jersey has to take a serious look at this regressive property tax that is used to fund schools. It just doesn't work.

Respondent #15:

We get some, but it's not significantly more to increase us from 5% to 6%. There is not a lot. I think a lot of that state funding I believe goes to the urban districts, the Abbot districts. So even from the standpoint of trying to get grants, it's difficult for us to qualify for a lot of grants, especially when they are economically targeted to other economic groups.

CB: ARE YOU AWARE OF WHETHER WE HAVE APPLIED FOR VARIOUS TYPES OF GRANTS?

Respondent #15:

We have gotten grants. We get a grant from Exxon every year. Dow Chemical, we have gotten grants from them. Union Carbide, we've gotten grants from them. Those are three that come to mind. Those have been annual grants that we've pursued and gotten for specific programs. There are certain criteria that they have in these grants that we've met and were able to receive those.

Respondent #15:

Financial is probably the biggest and it's not just the lack of dollars but it's also trying to educate the community on where you are spending your money or why you are raising or lowering taxes

depending on what you are doing in a given year and getting the real word out and getting people involved and understanding what is behind the budget in developing the budget.

CB: DO YOU HAVE A PROGRAM FOR THAT? HOW DO YOU GET THE WORD OUT?

Respondent #15:

We try to publicize the meeting where we hold the public meeting talking about the budget and reviewing the budget and you know, typically there's not a very big turn out to that. So last year and the year before we developed a newsletter that goes out prior to the vote trying to educate them as to what the school is doing and where the money is being spent. You know, why there tax rate is what it is and also to understand that our taxes here go to our local school, but they also go the high school and sometimes taxes go up and sometimes often the high school component goes up and it has nothing to do with us. I think a lot of people want to go in and vote down. They think if I just vote no, my taxes will go down.

CB: CAN YOU ELABORATE ON SOME OF THE OBSTACLES PRIOR TO THIS CURRENT SCHOOL YEAR REGARDING THE BUDGET?

Respondent #15:

Um, again this hurts all districts whether they are big or small schools. The state provides very little assistance upfront with Special Education. You know, you have a child who moves into the district with special needs and it is usually a couple of years before the state provides any additional funding for when they assess your overall special needs. So upfront, your district has to absorb that and our district does not have any in-house services for significant special needs. So, the Child Study Team evaluates and in this particular situation, we had a family move into the district and the child needed to stay where he was at a private institution at a cost of about \$80,000 a year. Now when you look at a \$2 million budget for K through 8 because that \$2 million budget does include our seventh and eighth grade costs of sending those students out and when a child comes in and represents 5% of your budge towards that, it's has an enormous impact. I mean by state law, we can only increase our budget by 3% a year. Now we have to pay the teachers an increase. There are other increase costs that come year to year. So, when you get hit with a 5% increase right from the start, where do you go? There is really nowhere to turn. So we this past year had to make some cuts in some of our programs that were extra, I guess you could say in terms of not being Core Curriculum. So we cut phys. Ed. Our teacher was part-time and we even cut that back further and we supplement that by having more free-time or supervised phys. Ed. by the classroom teachers. So we don't have a phys. Ed. teacher that actually instructing them form physical education every time they go out for phys. Ed. It might be their own classroom teacher. We cut our foreign language program further. It was a part-time position and we cut the school lunch program. So you know that can really have a dramatic impact. And like I said it can also impact larger districts, but sometimes they can shift things a little bit easier than we can. Such a small percentage of the district's budget is really discretionary or put toward things other than the Core Curriculum areas. I mean so much is tied up in insurance and salaries and those things. The Board really doesn't have a lot of say as to where money goes. It is really dictated by the state. So when you are hit with something like this, you really have nowhere to turn other than to pull out of your own programs, which is what we had to do. We could have gone to the community and asked for more money, but we were

capped at 3%. So we could not and if we put a second question on, which you can do for certain things, you have to put it on and it has to go to something specific a one-time. If you are going to fund something that way, you'd better make sure that it isn't something that is going to be funded every single year. In other words, if you want to fund a program, the way to do that is not through a second question because if that is something you need to fund for years ahead, you are asking for the money for this year. Well what happens the next year if they don't approve it again? It's gone. For example we put a second question on for computers this year and we received it and it is a capital expenditure. We bought it upfront and we don't have to pay anything again next year. If that was turned down, technically we could still buy computers, but it would have to come out of our own district budget.

Respondent #16:

That is such a tough one because administrative costs sound as if the administrator in charge is getting all the money and when you see the number attached to that you say, Oh my goodness. How can they possibly pay that person that much when in fact it isn't what the administrator gets. There are so many things that are considered administrative costs. Who would ever guess that all the telephones would be included in there and all the insurance payments that you have to make and they only mean personal health benefits, but to keep the building afloat payment to our auditor I think is in administrative costs. There are so many ancillary costs that really are not administrative in terms of the person who is in charge of the building, the salaried person. That is a hard concept to get across to people and I actually think it was designed to do that in an effort to make the smaller schools look less attractive in an effort to do away with the smaller schools.

CB: YOU ARE FINDING THAT YOU ARE DEFENDING YOUR SMALL SCHOOL?

Respondent #16:

Always. Always defending and unfortunately when you try to defend it sounds as though it is self-serving and in fact it really isn't but it's hard to convince people of that and budgets are so complicated to offer people to see the budget to go through a real budget which often times small schools do do it is hard to follow and it is hard to understand and so people immediately think that it is just a way of hiding what the administrator gets as a salary.

Respondent #17:

I think it is extremely difficult. I think there are two things, financial obstacles. When you look at L, it is just the one school and there are financial obstacles because it is just so costly so spending money is a problem period. When you are in a small school and you are competing with other schools for money, I think that that is a different kind of a problem. Uh, I my experience in District N, we were competing with basically with the large township school for a lot of resources and I have to say that it was really beyond even the financial. We had a grade level meetings structure where four times a year all of the grade level teachers would meet together and because the township teachers were 50% or more of all of the teachers at the meeting, their opinions prevailed. They sort of overwhelmed the discussion and I have to say that my teachers and probably the teachers in the other small school just felt a level of frustration about not being able to affect the kind of change that they might have thought was valid. The other thing that I think, when you talk about financial obstacles, I think that resources are a

problem. I always had a problem with my library. I wanted my library to be as good as the library in the big school. I wanted our children to have access to the amount and the quality of literature that those other kids had, but by the very nature of the size of the school I only had let's say half of the money. So I thought that that kind of thing was a disadvantage that our kids were not getting an equal education as compared to this larger school. However I also have to tell you that the larger school that is in a very nouveau riche, very affluent people who are used to getting what they want because they can pay for it and what was happening was if the principal couldn't get it through the budget, the PTO would pay for it, but there wasn't any thought about doing without. In the school that I was in, not only were there budget consideration, but then the parents were not as affluent so they weren't throwing at me to bridge the gap. The other thing that I have to say about financial obstacles in a way, when you are in a small school you are sharing staff if you are in a district that has other small schools on your level and that's a problem. Very often if you are sharing staff with a larger school, then you often get the dregs as far as scheduling is concerned. In L it is a problem because we didn't have a full-time librarian, an art teacher and all of those, so you know that was a problem. Trying to staff it, but staff is part-time for the specials and that is a problem. You don't very often get as good quality teacher and obviously you don't have their undivided attention. They're there a day or two a week and you know, it is a different mentality. You know, things happen on the days that they are not there that they are not aware of so they are part of the school, but not part of the school. I think that that is a problem especially at the elementary level. I think that having these people interacting with the kids all of the time would be more ideal, but it is just not possible.

Respondent #18:

I think one of the biggest obstacles is probably the financial aspect. When you see the money and I worked in an Abbott district so I know the money they get and rightly so they should have the same facilities, but we could use a little bit more money for facilities as well and you know, we just got a new computer lab, but we had to lease it because we could not afford to purchase it because we don't have the money, which really isn't a bad thing because in three years we'll get all new computers. Its like a car, but you never really do own them. Probably with technology it is not a bad thing, but I think the financial aspects, more than anything. It can become a little. Little issues can be major. The lunch schedule was off by five minutes last week because we had crossed two classes at the same time. You would have thought the world was going down, so it is that type of thing. It is just the little and everything is important and in many aspects is good because you do worry about everything and you know everybody. I would say the biggest obstacle is the financial. The financial obstacles are that you just don't have the resources that you have in other districts. You have to watch every penny. You have to watch every line item and its especially now with this new legislation. Its really, you can't even accrue money for long term in surplus that you might want to do something with within a year or two because you can't keep more than 3% this year and next year 2%. So, those are all obstacles especially that are going to impact small districts.

Respondent #19:

Again because it's a small school, your per pupil allotments are smaller so you if you are on the larger end of a small school you have to do with a lot less perhaps unless you find creative ways. I do that the principal at the school where my children went, which had three teachers per grade K to 5 so I think the staff did not number more than 25 people. The principal was always

soliciting grants and gifts from local agencies, which by the way did give to him freely to do some of the things we can do here because of the size we generate a lot of income if you want to call it that. Plus, we have a very large PTA very large. An example was the book fair that we had two weeks ago generated \$41,000 in sales in six days. It happens that we happen to be an affluent district, but still we had a staff of 12 book fair workers who were here six days in a row. You might be able to get two to three in a small school to do similar things for a shorter amount of time and generate a lot less money. The PTA budget here is in excess of \$100,000. They gave \$10,000 back to the teachers for classroom books. They bought playground equipment. They do all kinds of things. We have four visiting authors coming this year. We had character education activities for the children. They do a lot. In a small school, you wouldn't have the number of parents. It sort of takes a critical mass. So the principal winds of carrying on a lot of the fundraising activities, not unlike a private school.

Respondent #20:

The impact of 1701 we're going to feel that very heavily. We had tremendous savings in this district last year. I brought programs back, children back, and implemented Special Education programs, combined some positions and made tremendous savings. It ends up kind of hitting us in the back door because now we can't 6% in the budget now it's 3% this year and 2.5% and we tried very hard to cut costs and to curb things, but provide the up to date textbooks, etc. Our kids have all up to date textbooks. You know it is on a five year recycling in order to make sure that things are current and in line with the curriculum standards. Cost wise with 2.5% and you have teachers' raises that are 4.5%, obviously there is a flaw there. The county average for teacher raises is 4.5% so it's ludicrous for us to think it is going to under that, but yet our cap is 2.5% so our concern is what is going to happen down the line. Where are we going to have to cut and how do you? I have 28 students in first grade. I have two first grade classes. Well that is wonderful 14 and 14, but can I have 28 first graders? Absolutely not. Not even with an aid in the classroom. Not even with two aids in the classroom. The teacher is the one that drives the instruction so cost is a big concern. I have had part-time people on the Child Study Team and that's a hindrance in some ways because I need someone here everyday, so I have a part-time learning consultant now who I have added to a part-time Gifted and Talented. So now I have a full person five days just to do different types of jobs and we are hoping that helps. Full-time people you pay benefits to. Benefit costs rise and you know our budget is about \$6.1 million. Most of our costs are in salaries and we try for the supplies. There are two secretaries in the office. The Business Administrator doesn't have a secretary so those two secretaries are shared among three people and as we expand there is more work that is going to come down. We have a counselor who is also a social worker. I've got people wearing a number of different hats; plus we meet all the highly qualified so I have to have specialists at the middle school which I should. I mean instructionally of course I should, but the cost is a huge concern; insurance costs, facilities cost, upgrade. We have four sections of our building. The 1929 section, which is the little red schoolhouse that you passed on the way in, that particular building, this year we put a sprinkler system in because it is all wood. Now that is fire safe and it houses five classrooms. So cost is a huge concern and this all we have. Now an industry down the road is a huge part of our tax base, but they are appealing their tax increase so if they win that that is also a hit on the taxpayers. So cost is obviously a tremendous concern. It is very difficult to cut back more. We have \$23,400 in the budget, you asked about extra curricular things before. That is for after school activities and a summer program. So our kids aren't right next door to everyone, so this is

the hub so we run a full week summer program three days a week for all kinds of experiences. This year was learning around the world so there were lots of programs that were facilitated by our teachers that concentrated on that topic. So if we cut \$23,000 that is not even a penny on the taxes. I think a penny is \$50,000 here and that is a teaching position so that is what you have to cut. The parents would scream if we added to the class sizes, our classroom numbers and consolidated some classes. They know that instruction is lost at that point. We try not to have children fall through the cracks and we try to have more than one teacher in the classroom if we have to by IEP and then there are Basic Skills program too, but where do you cut besides salaries to get big-ticket items? The Board pays for field trips that is something that is in policy. If that goes, it's not even like that is \$50,000 so there are a lot of small things and those are the things that will go and then you have your instruction and your teaching salaries, but 4.5% increases and 2.5% cap how you can raise your budget, we have no idea and no teacher would settle for 2.5% increase. It's just not what is done all over the state so how do you expect this community to be any different?

Question 7

What are the curricular obstacles administrators face in running a small school?

Respondent #1:

This again goes back to the areas of creativity. One small school district that I have not necessarily curriculum. The South Hunterdon Regional school district at one point in time had one child study team that handled all the sending districts to the high school, which were three. So they had a student who started in kindergarten and that child was under the child study team from kindergarten all the way through grade twelve. Things like that have to be done as far as being creative and utilizing things of that type.

Respondent #2:

I don't think that the curriculum is the challenge. I think curriculum is curriculum. I mean you can't put a dollar amount to curriculum. I think what you do with the curriculum and the resources that you have to use and the way the teachers deliver the curriculum is the key piece. People do well here in this building with really nothing. I mean obviously if you walked into a J district or a brand new facility and everybody goes WOW! But, what is getting done? I think when you talk about curriculum its not so much what the curriculum is; it's how you deliver the instruction; what resources you give the teachers in tools. You know, we push technology pretty hard here and that is one of my big things, but it wasn't just putting computer in classrooms. It was using the technology we have like the smart boards that enhance and enrich your curriculum. You can give me a math book and pencils and paper and a curriculum and I can teach just as well as someone who has all the state of the art computers. So I don't agree that the curriculum has any downside impact on small schools.

Respondent #3:

I really don't see any curricular issues. The board has been very generous in supporting the curriculum. My master's program focused on curriculum and we've been able to work with the teachers and have them really actively involved in curriculum development all the way through from analyzing and assessing what the needs are and sending out needs assessments for parents

to looking at textbook publications and narrowing them down to which ones they thought would work for children to actually developing and writing the curriculum. They do it at least in pairs and sometimes all three of them at a grade level do it. For instance, this year we did math, which you would be interested in, and we have a format that we have to use. They come up with their goal and then they list their objectives and then they list their activities that they want to accomplish, the materials they want to use, the evaluation tool and then they have the column next to the objective they do last and that's tying into the Core Curriculum Standards. What we do is we don't write the curriculum based on the Core Curriculum Standards, we write a rigorous program based on what we feel as professionals that the children need to know and then we back in the Core Curriculum Standards to make sure we have covered them all. We don't take it from the Core Curriculum Standards to begin with and then we also look at the national standards when we do it. We do that for every single piece of curriculum that we write. So the teachers who are going to be teaching it are actively involved in the writing of it, the selecting of it, the analysis of it from the beginning. So we're not finding that we have real curriculum issues. We're able to offer on-grade level and above grade level math starting at second grade for children and then we offer up to two years above normally for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade except where we have a few unique situations. About ten years ago, we had a young man who went from here and then went over to Rutgers University as a second semester sophomore and what we had to do here was to provide. The parents took him to Rutgers for his calculus and his physics at the college level and we had to provide the world language and the humanities and the English so that he would be able to skip high school and go onto college and he was successful. So in a small school we were able to do that. We have a Gifted and Talented teacher and we just sort of wherever kids are that is where we focus on taking them and coming up with program so our curriculum has not really been an issue and the board has supported that. We offer two foreign languages. We offer French and we offer Spanish and we start in kindergarten with French just because the French teacher was available for a couple of periods when we hired her. We have two French teachers and two Spanish teachers in the building. K, 1, and 2 take French one day a week and we thought that wouldn't be enough for forty minutes because that is not how they tell you to teach it, but let me tell you the kids pick it up like this and they remember it and they really don't have to back track much, they just keep on moving forward. The board wanted to equally serve both the French and the Spanish, which we had in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade initially until the state came out with a mandate that they still have them tested for a world language and so on opposite years depending on when you would start third grade you would either take French or you would take Spanish for two days a week for forty minutes. At the end of fourth grade, you have to determine what you are going to do for your study for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. It could be French or it could be Spanish and as long as they have developed one language or the other, it doesn't seem to matter which one they finally end up on. They do fine. So we offer that. Our science program is basically hands-on. We use Foss and STC and then in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade we have formal labs. Teachers who are science certified to teach them a lot of cooperative group learning activities. Language arts we teach an eclectic approach to reading, because not all two children read the same or learn how to read the same. We have a series that we use for the teachers. The teachers who have been teaching for a long time have a wealth of materials and in Social studies we basically have developed a fine program of beginning to learn about themselves and their community all the way up to learning about the world. And then their senior year they do civics. We have a student council. We have peer leaders. We use advisor-advisee in the Middle School. We

creatively schedule things so that we can get a lot of things together. We can free up all the content teachers in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade at the same time to be able to talk about kids, talk about issues, whatever we need to do and we do that by tying that in with their choir, their band, and a study hall and it just frees up everything because the kids all have some place to go. What we do with the day is we have forty minute periods and we shorten them to thirty-five for the morning so that gives us an extra period and then that gives us a tenth period at 1:00 for our meeting and for the kids to do things and the last two periods on Wednesday are the forty minutes that we flop the rotation because kids learn different in the morning than they do in the afternoon and so we don't have a straight line schedule. We really have a creative schedule. So that the first two periods in the morning on Thursday have not been shortened yet, so they get shortened by five minutes and that gives us an extended homeroom to add to our homeroom time so we can do advisor-advisee and out of that the kids do service projects in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. They recommend advisor-advisee everyday and I think that is overkill. I think one day a week is good and we do it for twenty-five to thirty minutes. What we do with that is they not only have the homeroom teacher, but at that time all the special area teachers do not have specials so we pair a special area teacher with a classroom teacher so even if they have a homeroom of 22 now they have responsibility for 11 and 11 and they do group work together. One year the industrial arts teacher and an English teacher, I think they were sixth or seventh graders, they built knock hockey sets for one of the homes for children. I don't know if it was the batter homes, but they'll do different projects like that. So that really gives them a sense of being part of a community.

Respondent #5:

You have to develop committees with staff members to be included in that. It can't be a one-man show. We also have when vendors send us a grade level book, that book is for our grade level so that cost is much reduced than if we were buying a series for a bigger district. The flip side of that is because you can't purchase 25, you don't get the benefits of a reduced cost. I think for every 25 you get a free teacher's manual. We have to pay for the teacher's manuals. The numbers aren't there.

Respondent #6:

Well obviously offering a diversity of subject matter. In other words, if you have a full range of aptitudes, you have to make adjustments to the curriculum and you might not be able to provide as much diversification of curriculum. I am thinking more in terms of high school than I am of elementary, but even there, it is more challenging curriculum wise because you typically can't afford to have half time teachers. Half time teachers that most small schools employ have mixed loyalties because they may be in three other schools. So that you can't really use a full time art, music or home economics. Or whatever and so you are now hiring part-time people who either are parents part-time and teachers or they are in several schools and so they are into your building and out. I think also you can't afford a Child Study Team perhaps and then you suffer because you don't have a locally based Child Study Team to give personal attention that you need, the personal interest that you need. So I think there's a loss there. You don't have a culture that is there and stays there.

Respondent #7:

You know I always thought that in a small district they were under a tremendous handicap when it came to curriculum development, when it came to instruction, but I am really rethinking that. I really feel that maybe they don't have directors of curriculum or they don't have assistant superintendents of curriculum or they don't have department chairpersons or supervisors in order to guide the curriculum development, but a small district can empower their teachers to be the curriculum leaders and administrators in small districts must be curriculum leaders. They don't have a choice, ok. What better way than to have administration and teachers working together on developing curriculum, implementing the curriculum, looking at the staff development opportunities, and doing it as a team because research says that the biggest impact that takes place in the classroom is the teacher. And if the teacher is directly involved with the curriculum development and involved with learning and involved with their own staff development, and they are empowered, they are going to make more of any impact with kids. So in one way it looks like a real detriment to have a small district because they don't have the resources to develop the curriculum, but in one way it is also an opportunity for teachers to step up and play a different role and maybe a role that they were playing many, many years ago when schools weren't so big. And now with smaller districts that we have right now, they need to step up for No Child Left Behind. I see it being done right here in Milltown. Milltown all of the functions are decentralized to a great extent because we need to get a lot of things done. And a lot of my people, my administrators by the way wear an enormous amount of hats. Some of them are curriculum leaders and whatever, and principals and administrators and they are all doing different things. My teachers have many of them administrative responsibilities. The teachers themselves are being challenged to take a look at the data. We are building a learning community. They don't call it that here, but I am starting to see the fact that if they really went back and looked at some of the research that is being created on learning communities, they have a good jump on creating learning community here because they are all involved. They are involved for one purpose; the purpose is to provide a quality education to the kids that are here. So I really think we need to take a look at research and ask what is research saying. Research is telling us build these learning communities and build upon small success. Take little incremental steps, not big incremental steps. Little incremental steps and build then build upon that. And if you do that over long period of time, you are going to have a very fine system and kids are going to learn at a better rate than maybe being put into a very large system.

Respondent #8:

Actually it is easier. We make curriculum changes based on what we feel our needs are and in a smaller school we can make those changes without going through a lot of bureaucratic red tape. We have a very cooperative board. We have a committee that works within our school to look at different areas of the curriculum and when we need to make a curriculum change, we can easily do that in a quicker manner than in a larger district. I've worked in large districts and sometimes it takes a while to get through that process to change a book that you are using or to change a reading series or a math series or something like that. So I think that there is more involvement and it's top to bottom. We'll just sit together and work it out and then get it done. So I think it is easier. Actually what I like about smaller districts is that you can get more done in a short period of time.

Respondent #9:

Well, none of us work at the high school level and I imagine the challenges there are a lot more because at the elementary, you tend to have an integrated curriculum versus specialty curricular options. So, at the high school level to try to have a full block of options, I think is difficult. And I know that Dr. Simone is leaving the high school has talked about that. I think she did an admirable job and trying to have people with different languages meet and with shared services to try to get different people in there. I would see that as difficult. At the elementary level, um, for us what's difficult is our related arts teachers are part-time and typically you don't get people who are going to stick around long at ten percent position or you'll get people who are just starting out who want to get their foot in the door. So, it is difficult to have retention. Well, um, the advantages as I spoke earlier are being able to have this institutional change. You can just come in, train the teachers, get it done, and check in. So I think you can quickly adopt a new series and get support for that. Um, one of the disadvantages is that there isn't a large staff. For example, our recess duty is done by our teachers and the related arts teacher covers one classroom at a time so you don't have common planning time. If you had that common planning time you can get one grade together. What we don't have are curriculum specialists that are trained in a particular area that are out there focusing on that one area. I think we end up tending to the big picture and the overall picture. Overall I think our curriculum has behind the times and I think sometimes the status quo of the other administrator that has been there for many years. I think you can't be insular in that regards because its just one person running the show. So if your not going out to workshops and its hard for me to stay abreast of developmental language arts and social studies and everything is supposed to be my specialty.

Respondent #10:

At District I, I still have the luxury of a curriculum coordinator. Although she has returned to a full-time classroom teaching position, she is still stipended for curriculum coordination. She does all of the formal five-year cycle curriculum assessment. I really do believe that without that position, our curriculum for the formal five-year assessment piece would suffer tremendously. You know that would be the intent to keep the ball rolling, however I do believe that the one administrator school district as we get crunched further and further with the administrative penalties, curriculum will suffer and it is the role the chief school administrator and principal to keep that alive and moving and spend, to me, that is where all the time should be spent to keep your curriculum fresh as Todd alluded to. That was one of his first jobs on board. Right?

Respondent #11:

Yes, and the other thing that I am shocked that my two esteemed colleagues have not mentioned is our work together on a K-12 curriculum. Under Dr. Simone's leadership beginning not last year, but the year before through a grant we worked on K-12 science. Last year we completed the science work and we began social studies K-12 piece. So, that is just another example of four small schools working together for the same kids and that will help to keep our curriculum fresh in all of our schools.

CB: AND YOU ARE ABLE TO MAINTAIN THE QUALITY OF THOSE STAFF?

Respondent #14:

I think so. I think so only because when you are talking about teachers, you come to discover very quickly if you have a teacher who is not providing the kids the services they need and you just don't permit that to continue. I work very closely with my colleague in District M and we discuss issues with respect to instruction. One of the things they do for us, because we can't afford to do it with a small size, is to take our eighth grade students on a tuition basis for Algebra I. We send our kids to District M first thing in the morning so that they can have an Algebra I class. There are five kids out a class of 14. The rest of the kids are not ready for the abstractness of algebra. Some may never be ready for the abstractness of algebra. But, you know, that is how we provide for the creative solutions for the curricular issues that we need to deal with.

CB: WITH RESPECT TO THE CURRICULUM, ANY OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES THAT YOU HAVE DONE TO MAKE MORE EFFECTIVE THE COMPETITIVENESS?

Respondent #14:

Well, what we have done in the ten years that I have been here is to articulate the curriculum with all the districts sending students into the high school. The teachers meet on a regular schedule four to five times a year. We give them a charge in terms of objectives and they work on bringing it into a cohesive whole, so that all the kids going from eighth grade into ninth grade are pretty much on the same page. Um, we do that in language arts. We do it in mathematics. We do it in world languages. We do it in science particularly well. The place where we are having difficulties doing it well is in social studies because nobody wants to give up their piece of the territory. I think World War II is more important than the Korean War than more important than Grenada. God knows nobody remembers Grenada these days, but it is that part of, if you talk about Fenwick English and the plane being able to take off and the bomb gets larger and larger. Well, that is what happens in social studies. Everybody wants to cover everything that went on in social studies and we had these on-going discussions as to what is important and what is not important, but at least we are talking about the issues. Um, and they tend to be somewhat more maverick than the English teachers are and you would think it would be the other way around, because the English teachers tend to more of a free thinker. Uh, but English teachers tend to have it together in terms of curriculum and they pretty much agree what our kids need, so you don't hear that kind of charge that we have heard in other places that I have worked in. Oh, the kids are not prepared to go to high school as well as x, y and z, because they all have a stake in everyone's success.

Respondent #15:

I think one of the biggest obstacles has been you know our students are here K through 6 and then they merge in with a much larger district in seventh grade and in the past, and I have not had a child go through this to experience this personally, but what I hear from the community is our students go over to seventh grade and they have been on a whole different track in terms of curriculum and when I was first on the board, that was just the way it was. They would have to adapt to that. What we have tried to do with our shared services relationship being that that district that we send to is the superintendent that we share here is include our teachers and our curriculum committee with their curriculum groups so that the curriculum is developed together. It may be implemented back in our district a little bit differently, but the idea is that they are all

on the same track so that when our sixth graders graduate and go to seventh grade over in that district, they are at least a little more in tune to what those students have been involved in.

CB: SO YOU'VE BEEN TRYING TO KEEP THE CONTINUITY WITH THE MIDDLE SCHOOL?

Respondent #15:

That's probably the biggest challenge was trying to match that up a little bit, but the responsibility is on the administration on our administrator to tell us what is a good curriculum and to present it to us and for us to approve it. So I mean the role of the board definitely should not be to determine the curriculum.

Respondent #17:

I would be the same idea and I think it was worse in L than anywhere else because of the fact that we having staff just a couple of days a week that there isn't that flexibility when you have that. I think that trying to get money for teacher training and running workshops or things like that, you know, very often I felt like we were the poor relations and we were waiting for charity. A teacher/writer would do a workshop the first day I was there, but she basically gave us that workshop. She did it free of charge and it was wonderful and she is a great professional, but if she hadn't volunteered, then what? We didn't have the money for staff development and I think that is a problem. I think it is a big problem in this day and age. You sort of get stuck in a rut.

Respondent #21:

I think the biggest thing that we struggled with was getting the added courses for kids. We had all the regular high school courses, but we didn't have the extra classes. What would you call them?

CB: Electives.

Respondent #21:

Yes, electives. We had trouble getting enough kids to take certain courses and you can't run a course at least at the high school with four or five kids in them so we had a hard time getting the foreign languages into the high school like Russian. What we did was we looked to distance learning as an option. You had some kids that could take the course and we didn't have to run it in-house for only those few kids. So distance learning was a viable option for us. We could also do this with more advanced math classes. We had kids taking calculus, but anything higher than that we had them take a distance-learning course.

Question 8

What types of organization practices have you used in your small schools?

a. In containing costs?

Respondent #1:

One of the biggest things that my clients do, particularly hear in our county, they have cooperative agreements as far as purchasing for goods or services. They have cooperative agreements for transportation. They utilize the consortium considerably for not only transportation, special education, the hiring of part-time teachers. What they are attempting to do throughout the state of New Jersey is already being done in some counties and is very predominant here in the county. The school districts work together not necessarily as regionals, but as friendly communities where they work together to be very cost conscience.

CB: ANYTHING THAT YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH IN REGARDS TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, I KNOW THAT IT'S ONE OF THE THINGS THAT SPECIFICALLY SMALL DISTRICTS HAVE TRIED TO AFFORD?

Respondent #1:

Again it's a question of doing things together. If I remember correctly, Hunterdon Central High School runs programs for the at least the five communities that send their kids to Hunterdon Central with them constantly keeping their teachers abreast of what is going on. So another words, they take the five sending districts to Hunterdon Central are constantly communicating the educational needs of the high school and they are just passing it down to the grammar school sending districts so those kids are ready when they get into high school. And I talked previously about the study team in South Hunterdon where the child is known to the child study team from kindergarten all the way through twelfth grade. Definitely an advantage to the school districts. They have to work together.

Respondent #1:

I just wanted to talk about the Hunterdon Learning Center, which is not a public school, but is a tuition school that a lot of my clients, Hunterdon Learning Center is a client of mine, but again it is a small school and their graduation rate has about 60% of their kids going on to continuing education. These children cannot be handled within the high schools because of their behavior problems or what have you. But again because of the smallness of the class sizes at the Hunterdon Learning Center, they are able to graduate and continue on to some type of education beyond high school. And 60% is a very high percentage as far as I am concerned.

CB: SO FOR EXAMPLE, THESE ARE KIDS THAT HAVE BEEN PLACED OUT OF THEIR DISTRICTS. SO ESSENTIALLY THEY ARE AN OUT OF DISTRICT PLACEMENT?

Respondent #1:

Right. They are primarily behavioral problems. They have problems at home. Not handicapped children, but problems as far as attention and what not. They are a very difficult child to work

with. That is why they can't keep them in their local high schools, because they are too disruptive.

Respondent #2:

Well, yeah we have done some shared things. Unfortunately, my business administrator retired and Ronnie was really the really the foundation of the finances here. I like to spend money. You know if I see something, I need someone to keep me in checks and balances. But over the last four years, obviously Choice money has helped, but we run a pretty tight ship. We have been able to put away over half a million dollars in capital reserve out of surplus over the last four years. We have always had 6% in surplus and have been able to maintain that. I don't think the teachers have ever been denied really anything they really needed. If they needed it bad enough, I'd find it. Our foundation has been a big help with mini grants and things like that. Home and School has helped out with assemblies and the Drug Alliance. As far as shared services, we have done some jointures with transportation. We belong to the co-op for food. I do some stuff with Atlantic County through AVA and also ETTC for shared services professional development. But overall it is really managing your ship and I mean we're not excessive in administrative costs. We're way below the box. I've been running this building basically by myself with some help internally and finally got a curriculum person. But it really is watching what you are spending and not putting yourself in a position where people are going to say to you that you are spending too much here or there. In four years the taxpayers in this town have had zero to maybe 4% tax increase. The bond referendum passed two to one and it was a \$0.23 tax hit of these people in this community who felt we needed to get this thing done. So I think when you are running something, a small district you have to be more fiscally responsible and you have to keep a better eye on what you are spending. Yeah, I mentioned we are in a co-op for food. We do that. We do shared services for paper. We are looking right now. We're looking to do a jointure with the county for ink cartridges. Um, you know we are also looking at doing some other shared services through special services through assistive technology devices. Like if I have a phonic ear system that I am not using and a district wants to use it for a year, it is almost like a loaning out in effect. I think if I have, with the reauthorization we are looking at hopefully there are going to give us more Choice districts per county. Right now it is one per county. And we are looking at either two per county or no two in the same configuration so if I am K-8, it could be a 9-12 or a radius. For instance, District U, which is all the way down south in a southern county is Choice district, but people from Medford and all the way up there, they're not going to send their kids. So, we have been looking at that issue and the reason that I mention that is because if you have seats available and you are small district, apply for Choice. I went down to District V. They applied. I talked to another district to try to get them to apply; a neighboring district and they are a little skeptical. What happens is Lavallette went through this. The first year I went through this a colleague took me to a night meeting and the community came out and we don't want those kids in our district. And I said to Mary, we are done here, let's leave. You don't have a chance to have them buy Choice here. They didn't realize what Choice could do for them and what kind of financial. So any small district, if you have the classes and you have the seats available, and the application and there is nobody around, you know it is worth it. I think the other thing is you just have to really keep a close eye on what you do. You know everything goes up. Transportation goes up; your salaries and all those things. I think if you have a good staff and people who are willing to work with you and not against you, when it comes down to financial issues like negotiations and salaries and things like that, I mean our salary guide is not

bad at the bottom. At the top it is horrible right now. But you are working in a nice environment. I have worked in a war zone. You can go work in a war zone and you will make a lot more money, but you will be burnt out in two years. People have been here 37 and 30 years. There is a reason that they stay. So I mean you have to take the good with the bad.

Respondent #2:

Well first of all here they didn't have any option. There were some naysayers that were sitting in the background. They weren't in the forefront. I mean you hear it, but they knew that they had not option here because I made it very clear. You're driving this bus and if you didn't have Choice that town over there would be driving your bus. You did have some nay sayers and people were kind of concerned about it, but the bottom line is, look to your left and look to your right, one of you wouldn't be here if there was no Choice. I mean that was the reality. So, I don't think they were really negative in that sense. Now that they saw the financial impact they have become a lot more Choice friendly. I had a couple of parents who said well, because the Choice kid was on the bus, the bus was ten minutes later than before. Even the valedictorian wasn't an issue. I thought that might be one, but that never became an issue with the parents. So here it was fine. Other districts it was a hard sell. I mentioned Lavallette. They didn't even apply. Kenilworth had mentioned he had a real battle in the beginning because his district is a sending district like Elizabeth, places like that where parents are a little concerned, but over time if you just show that the impact on your school is nothing but positive, how can anybody complain.

Respondent #2:

Well I sit on the small schools council at NJASA and that represents all the small schools in the state and I also chair the one here and we pretty much when we have our round tables, which is our county round table usually if there is information that needs to be passed to them the smaller districts we do. We haven't really met formally. There really hasn't been a need. Nobody has really went out said that we need to do that because a lot of times what will happen is a lot of stuff that happens in the round table with the bigger districts affects us anyway. You know we have talked about getting together and talk about some consolidated services and looking for business, going out to the Chamber of Commerce and looking for business input, but again we would rather do that as a county superintendent district rather than just small schools. But there is a lot of communication between the smaller districts. We have an educational foundation that was established before I got here. In fact I didn't ever realize I was the executive director until I signed my contract. They said, by the way you're the executive director and you have a golf tournament to do in two months. They have been very, very good. We have been struggling the past year trying to figure out how to raise money. The golf tournament is done; it has run its course. But they have been good about giving money to the teachers when they write mini grants for leadership trips, summer programs. We have taken the kids to the Ocean Life Center and out in the water for science experiments. The foundation funded the first year I brought Stokes here. We take the sixth grades to Stokes State Forest for three days and two nights and now they still fund 50% of it. It is a good resource with the new facility coming; we will use the foundation if people want to make donations. If people want to give me \$50,000 to put a plaque in the library, that's great. We'll run it through the foundation, so it's got a lot of value.

Respondent #3:

Special Ed. we try to house in house as much as we can. We're very selective of those we send out of the district. Two years ago was the first time we became owners of a bus, because our transportation costs for Special Ed. for our pre-school handicap were astronomical. We were able to hire a full-time bus driver with benefits and give her some routes and still save \$50,000 and pay for all the expenses of the bus, including our payment. So that's helped. We do bulk buying of energy through a consortium in a neighboring county. We also do bulk buying of paper and school supplies through a consortium. We have busing. We hire a bus company through contract through a bidding process. We have six buses that transport the students to school. Those are in addition to the bus that we have, bus just for the pre-school alone, it was costing us like; three years about \$25,000 to bus the kids and then we also have a summer program. So we just hired a bus driver for eleven months out of the year and Special Ed. runs can run you \$30,000 a run. A couple of those together and you piggyback them. She's able to do that and our pre-school run and we were able to provide her the benefits and her salary and we have a couple of substitute drivers and we have a bus company that actually services our buses, but it has paid dividends for us. Maybe \$50,000 doesn't sound like a whole lot, but once you add it up every year. Even though it's a \$10 million dollar budget, \$50,000 is \$50,000.

Respondent #4:

Well, we are an inclusion district in District C. It was rare that we would send a child out if we thought we could provide the services for the child ourselves. We believed in that. We believed that if a child had a disability, that he or she could always benefit from students that were in the mainstream and that was the philosophy of the board, the philosophy of the faculty in the building. In extenuating circumstances there are cases where students need to be sent out of district because you can't always provide them the services that they need, but we would always make every attempt to keep the children in district and provide them the services that they needed, which would necessitate our classroom teachers to be very well versed in meeting the needs of the classified students at the same time having challenging curriculum for the students that were excelling and moving on. So it's a real balance. We developed our own pre-school program rather than sending students out that was a cost saving measure. The School Choice was another reason we got involved in that to save money, but to be very honest with you eventually you are going to run out of option as to what you can do and this is why I am thinking the idea of having 613 school districts in a state with 8 million people. You go out of the state of New Jersey and you tell people that and they look at you like that is bizarre, that's crazy you know. The Department of Education and even the Governor has been resistant to forced regionalization, but I think all of the legislation that is coming down is a clear message that if you don't begin to become more creative in sharing services and sharing services with district and teaming up with districts that eventually you are not going to operate any more. District C in terms of sharing services, what we do with the consortium is that we are a shared services provider. We bundle up school districts and come together and provide a cheaper telephone rate. We can purchase gasoline. We can purchase fuel oil to heat their buildings and if they purchase it through us and become part of our consortium then they get it at a cheaper rate. That is what we have been charged to do with our charter here at the Commission and that is what we do. In a school district like District C, they took advantage of every opportunity that they had to save

money. So I mean there are some of the administrative decisions that you have to make when you are in a small district like that if you want to continue. The consensus of the community is they want to be autonomous. They don't really want to partner up. I think if you ask the over 600 districts, I mentioned 613. There may even be more with charter schools that we have to consider to be school districts now, because they are held to the same standards. We're probably looking at closer to 700 school districts in the state of New Jersey and I mean if you go to Pennsy or you go to Florida and you tell educators that we have this many districts, they look at you like what are you crazy, but the flip side of that is when you merge school districts what happens, are you eliminating positions? So I'm certain the NJEA wouldn't be a real supporter of that or even the New Jersey Association of Principals and Supervisors wouldn't be real supportive because you would be eliminating positions. But I think especially here in the county with 22,000 students and we have 30 school districts. Now I worked in a school district in Jersey City where we had 30,000 students and we were one school district. So in essence is what I am telling you is I worked in a school district that we had more students in that school district than we have in this entire county and I when I first came to the county in June of 2000 and I realized that we had 30 school districts with 22,000 kids, I thought to myself, we could probably operate more efficiently with four K through 12 regional school districts than we are operating with 30 school districts. However, that would have been a very tough sell in the county and I realize that so this is what I was thinking. I never broached the subject with any of the administrators, but I think that you have to be thinking in that direction in the near future because funding is becoming limited and I as I said this bill 1701 is really going to limit school districts to what they could do and it's going to force school districts to consider that poison r word the regionalization word because no one really wants to look at that. Oh yes. I think it is going to impact education. What I think you are going to see happen Christine is class sizes expanding. You won't be seeing the same extracurricular activities afforded to students. Those kinds of programs are going to suffer. They really are. I don't think in reality it's going to save the taxpayers money in the long run. In my personal opinion, it will give the illusion of it. I truly honestly believe that from an elected official's position that it has the appearance of a measure to save taxpayers money. However, I don't really know in reality if it's going to save the taxpayers, but I could be wrong. I know it is going to have a negative impact on education and I know here at the ESC we have already seen the negative impact that it is going to have on us because districts don't have the money that they can send the student out of district to us to get the services that he or she may need. Our population here is we have Special Education students and we have what we call alternative ed. kids. These are the disaffected students that for whatever reason weren't cutting the mustard in their home district. They send the youngster to us and in many cases the child is 17 and he or she is still a freshman. They haven't achieved too much success and the hope and expectation is that we are going to make these students better and we have a wonderful faculty. Our philosophy here is that we have low student to teacher ratios where we wrap the program around the students' needs instead of saying this is our program and if you can't fit, you are not going to make it here. So a lot of kids when they come here are angry because they haven't achieved any success and our job is to manipulate situations to allow these students to achieve success, develop their self-esteem, get them feeling good about themselves and we have a tremendous number of success stories that our kids do well. The unfortunate thing is with the current legislation being passed this 1701, it's going to limit school districts from sending out of district. They are going to have to develop these programs in district and they don't always have the resources or the staffing pattern to provide the same kind of a program. So in my opinion, it is

going to hurt education. I really do. Do I have the answer as to how we can lower taxes? I wish I did. I have some thoughts on it, but I just don't know if they would work either. I don't think this is going to work. This is really going to cripple districts, because I mean you are limited. You can't exceed a certain threshold for administrative costs. So what we are saying is that if you are opening a new middle school where you have 600 or 700 students, you may only have to operate that school district with a building principal and to think that a building principal can be effective in running the building, evaluating and maintaining the building and doing budgeting and doing everything that is required of a building principal without some assistance, something is going to fall through the cracks. So it is a big concern. We attended a school boards meeting here in the county last Wednesday evening that Senator Leonard Lance was at the meeting. He did vote on the bill because his reason for voting on the bill was it was something that the Governor wanted because he thought that it could help tax relief and I disagree with it. I politely disagree with that philosophy. I just think that it should have been more well thought out. It passed in a matter of two weeks and I suspect that there will be several amendments because you cannot have a bill that restricts you to 2.5 administrative fee and then have a mediator from the state coming in and recommending a 5% salary increase for faculty members. Where is that money coming from, you know? What do you do? So these are challenging times in education. They really are. So I think the small school the way we know it, it may become obsolete in the near future. I mean we have many small school districts here in The County. I mean you have the School N with 125 kids. You got District O. District O is the smallest school district in the state of New Jersey with 55 students, but the superintendent is the building principal. She is on some days the custodian. On some days she is the curriculum coordinator. On some days she is the technology authority and on some days she is the head bottle washer. She is a wonderful individual and this is a township that is just resistant to pairing up with some neighboring towns such as District B. District B is a K through 6 district with about 175 kids. You have District E, which is another school district and all of those little districts they send to the regional high school, which is a 7 through 12 regional high school. There is only 383 kids in the regional high school and that is grade 7 through 12. So when you just look at the county, if you will that we have 30 school districts for 22,000 kids, it is pretty bizarre. It really is.

Respondent #5:

Just for professional development, we were lucky to have on our staff a professor at a college that comes in and she has given us professional development in differentiation of instruction and learning styles. So we look for avenues like that to save on professional development. We also share services with our neighboring district. We can use individuals there. We have used Neil Charles to come in to help with technology and we turn key. We have someone go and come back and explain to the staff. I have done that with technology as well and you know we have staff members who do that as well.

Respondent #6:

Well, the small school that I am associated with has a principal and a vice principal and that is all as far as the administrative. They also have an executive secretary who helps with the results of the assessments and things like that. She is really an administrative assistant, but that is all. There are 450 students in the school and there will never be any more. So you have three people who are not directly involved in instruction through the whole staff. So I think that maintaining

and keeping a very careful eye on non-teaching personnel. Do you really need them? You can certainly economize by employing part time, you know. There is a loss and a gain there, but you can fill those needs.

Respondent #8:

Ok. Well we try to do that with as many districts as we can. You know whether it is with busing or sharing professional development for staff. We will do that. We try to share people because some of the speakers that we need to come in or people that will do workshops are quite expensive so we would have to meet with other districts and figure out how to get them in here and then get all the districts here at the same time.

Respondent #9:

Well, we try to share services wherever we can or it's feasible wherever it makes sense. One example is our business administrator. I think she is the lamp cloth business administrator, but her salary isn't as competitive with other business administrators in the area.

Respondent #9:

And we pay her approximately under \$20,000 for her services and the District I office is very accommodating. I'll come down to the school and meet with her. There will be time and energy spent on the job for us.

Respondent #9:

But the benefit is, is that we can supplement her salary so that she can and they can have stability with their business administrator. So it is kind of symbiotic relationship.

Respondent #9:

I believe so. My predecessor, did at one time, do the job of the business administrator. I am just glad that I don't have to. There are not, to me, not always cost effective. You have to look at it. For ours, we had contracted for speech therapists and they didn't have their own speech therapist. So we had to use private speech therapy at double the price. So they were less expensive, but now we have more and more speech time and they bill us at an hourly rate, so I am talking to Rich about maybe we could use his a full-time speech therapist for 10% to come do ours. So you are always kind of finagling the deal and sometimes it is a great service versus a private, but on the other end transportation. I got a much deal for transporting a student to another school for special education from District Q than I did from the consortium. It was \$30,000 versus \$6,000. So, it was a huge discrepancy, so you really have to look carefully at that. I would say that that is one thing that you are always finagling.

Respondent #9:

We don't have an auditorium so they have been inviting us to some of their assemblies when they have a presenter come in as long as we provide the transportation that our students can see the play. What is still important in a small school, you just don't have a lot of interaction. You don't. You interact with your staff and sometimes there's a professional level that you have to pull to so it is very refreshing to just be able to let down your guard.

Respondent #10:

We cannot afford to pay a full time business administrator the going rate. So, it is \$30,000 under the going rate. It is a win-win. We are winning because it keeps our business administrator in the financial, competitive salary range and Stockton wins because at the price of under \$20,000, they are able to maintain a certified business administrator. I think other shared services include bulk purchasing. We do all of our purchasing through the ESC bulk purchasing prices and that gives us discount. We were involved in shared services for child study team, which benefited all four districts. That became not cost effective for one or two districts and so we are looking into providing other ways of using those services. Any in-service opportunities we are in agreement that we share our send out to each other. We do share reports as well and brainstorm ideas on how to attack different challenges.

Respondent #10:

Right, actually how I view this set up is, it is one district K-12 with three elementary buildings and high school. So, we are the four people that get together to make the decisions and many, many things affect each other. From anything from back to school nights that share the same parents. It is just like a district of four schools is how we run it. So we touch base with all of that for back to school nights to concerts and events to parent conferences.

A perfect example, we share a sixth grade science trip where the high school peer leaders, or whatever they are called up there, actually are the counselors to our sixth graders on this trip. So it is a joint trip. It is a science event. It is an overnight environmental camp.

Respondent #11

On an in-service days I had a REAP grant the last couple of years, so we got in some in-service presentations that cost a significant amount of money, so I said to my friends send as many people as you want for free. So, those kind of things as well. Our kids went to a play in District I in the spring. Dorney field park field trips sometime together, class trips those kinds of things. I mean we really do look out for each other very well. We meet at least monthly. We talk all the time. I'm very appreciative of it and I couldn't do my work without it and I wouldn't do without it. So, we meet the four of us on a monthly basis and then the superintendents in the county meet on a monthly basis we get lots of opportunity for networking.

Respondent #11:

Respondent #9 will write a major grant or something like that and do all the work and then share it with us as a template, which really helps all of us very seriously. If one of us is able to attend a workshop and the other isn't, we'll come back with materials and talk about that at our monthly meetings. The board presidents meet together monthly. I think it is monthly or fairly monthly.

Respondent #12:

Well financially we provide what I consider zero-based budgeting. We start every year with our staff and ask them what is it that you need this year and then we look at that and decide if there really is a need with it and how does that need fit in with the larger needs of the community or the school and then make a decision financially whether the board can sponsor all of those needs or not and if we can't, where can we go back and cut. So I think the operational skills because

we're small and because my philosophy and Respondent #13's philosophy is we involve other people in the decision-making. We're very collaborative. We try to make decisions as often as we can with as many people as we can. Sometimes it doesn't always allow us because of the immediacy of a decision, but in many, many cases the staff is directly involved in the decision making for budget, for educational decisions, changes we might make in the curriculum. Our teachers rewrite our curriculum. We don't. All I do is approve it. They're the educational experts. I'm the generalist. He is the budgetary guy, yet he doesn't tell the teachers where to spend their money. If we have to make cuts, we don't make the cuts. We just tell the teachers we have to cut 10%. You tell us where we need to make the cuts and I think that is pretty much an example of how we operate in all of our decision-making.

Respondent #12:

When they look at administrative spending for those students in terms of student population, you can't count the hundred students at the high school, but part of DA job is making sure those services are met for those kids. Part of my job is too because we basically contract with District J to educate our high school kids. So my responsibility to the taxpayer and the parents of the hundred students who don't go to school here is to make sure they are getting a quality education and that can be more difficult in a sending receiving than in a regional or K12.

Respondent #12:

And now they're talking about whether we need a principal in every school. It just can't happen. And then you have a district like District S who is about the size of ours K to 6. They're in trouble because their administrative spending is too high. They only have one administrator. You can't any smaller or more efficient than one person, yet they are under inspection for that.

Respondent #13:

So in a regional like in our northern county regional. I envy my BA's up there because District W is a true regional and they do the transportation for the whole covered area the participating area not so on a sending receiving even though we are very collaborative, it's more like a business relationship we have with out sending high school rather than their district being the umbrella organization. I mean I just throw that in because they say when they divide and one of the things that you probably know is one of the things we are really on the hot seat for is administrative costs per pupil and in small school districts that is very difficult because if you want quality talent. And by the way superintendents in part of the country do not earn even 80% or 70% of what they pay in neighboring districts and I know that for a fact. The problem is even though your numerator may not be higher per capita, your denominator is small. Even though we have to administer to these non-public kids and these high school kids, we are not allowed to put the numbers in the denominator. Walla! Why are your administrative costs per student so high? Believe me I tell this in front of the boss, I tell him I didn't know this was a ten-hour a day job and now Governor McGreevey is saying to me oh, you should be able to administer to two or three districts. You could probably do that. Yeah, when would I sleep?

Respondent #14:

Well, the latest thing that we did was to form two multi-age classrooms in first and second and third and fourth. The teachers have done a marvelous job. They are my newest heroes, those

teachers who did that for us. We suffered a tragedy this summer because one of the teachers who was instrumental in making that work perished in a plane crash and she had to be replaced and I went on a desperate search to find someone who had experience in multi-age classes and I was able to attract somebody to the district, I think it was by the grace of God, who had taught a multi-age classroom in Ohio in a first and second grade class in Ohio and also taught a multi-age classroom third and fourth grade in Waterloo, Belgium. So, that was the answer to my prayers. Um, so that was the first thing that we have done. What we have also done is to jump on board with the concept of shared services between school districts. The cliché from the state department is that if you are not regionalized, act as though you are regionalized and we do that. Uh, I share, one of the first in this county, a business administrator with another school district. We share the business administrator with District M, so that cost is pretty self-contained. It hasn't gone up dramatically in the past four or five years. We share a French teacher with District M. We share a computer teacher with District M. We tried to share a music teacher, but we just couldn't make it work out in terms of schedule. Um, we share maintenance or custodian type-work with the borough. We share cafeteria services with Holland Township School. So, if I look at what I actually have left in terms of the core staff, I'm talking about maybe eight or nine people and the rest are shared with other locals. We are managing to maintain costs.

Respondent #15:

Yeah, I think what we went through in terms of determining the shared services arrangement that whole process that we went through. Prior to this shared services arrangement we had a chief school administrator who served as our superintendent/principal and a full time business administrator. They both resigned at the same time and we brought in an interim superintendent in the mean time to see us through. He took us through a decision model and that process we've used even beyond this but it was an excellent process I think to really understand what all of our options were and to explore all of our options. We basically are a five-member board and we determined amongst the board members what really were the options that were out there. We through them all out there. There were really five options: send-receive, status quo you know hiring another principal, look for a shared services arrangement, completely outsource and regionalize. So we then involved the community and set up groups to go out and research. Each board member worked with a couple of community members and we went out and made phone calls. I had the existing system and researching that and talked to other districts in the area and the school board association helped us with names and contacts and we talked to those people to determine how it ran for them and the experiences they had. We brought it all back. We discussed those things and just systematically through a numbered system really determined the value we placed on each one of those areas. You know where we would lose control, where we would lose financial control, where we would lose our sense of community, and assigned values to those things and then looked at each of our options to determine you know what was most important to the community and which one of those satisfied those needs the most. That process really brought it down to something that I really never expected going into it that I would support and that was a shared service agreement. I went into that personally feeling like that was not a direction to go, but at the end of the process realized that was worth the risk that was involved in trying it and that was what we did. We moved forward with that.

CB: SO YOU CURRENTLY SHARE?

Respondent #15:

We started the shared services arrangement strictly sharing the superintendent and the business administrator from our neighboring district and that ended up sharing a lot more as the relationship progressed and it's definitely a challenge. It is a relationship. It's like any other interpersonal relationship. You really have to work at it to keep it going smoothly. It's not been an easy process. We have definitely had bumps throughout, but we worked together on it and it's pretty solid the relationship we have.

CB: NOW THIS IS A YEAR-BY-YEAR CONTRACT?

Respondent #15:

It is contracted annually. July 1st of every year we enter into a new agreement with them and we've expanded it, as I said, beyond using just the services of the superintendent and the business administrator. We now use the services of their technology person there who helps us. He comes over and helps if we have problems with our computers. He does the troubleshooting here. He trains the staff. Child Study Team is also run out of our neighboring district. So that again because of the pressure of the economics with our budget last year. We had to look for more creative ways and we have expanded the shared services relationship and that has enabled us to maintain, quite honestly at one point we were considering have to merge the first and second grade into one class with one teacher, which just doesn't seem to be moving in a forward direction and so we expanded our shared services relationship in other areas outside of the directly in each classroom and that's worked so far.

Respondent #15:

Sure, we have done that on a lot of levels. All of our supplies, our paper supplies and thing like that are ordered with our neighboring district. So we take advantage of when they place their order, we place our order to take advantage of that. We also purchased our computers last year through our neighboring district with their order. So we had a significant savings by doing that and the other things we have gone into those. We've gone in and out of those consortiums. We did one with electricity and they kind of monitor it and at some point it became less advantageous so we got out of it. We just looked at the oil and we just went into that one with oil service. So we kind of go in and out of those.

CB: HOW ABOUT A CONSORTIUM? HAVE YOU USED THEIR SERVICES?

Respondent #15:

For busing services?

CB: YES OR ANY OF THESE TYPES OF SERVICES?

Respondent #15:

Yes, we talked to the consortium when we were looking at shared services. You know we talked to them about sharing services of a business administrator and even having a superintendent, but it just wasn't the best option when we went with our neighboring district, but we have used some of their services, but beyond busing and exploring those I'm not sure what we had. They were at

one time involved in our computer consulting with problems with the computers. We just found it easier to work with our neighboring district.

Respondent #16:

Well we are great sharers. We do a lot of shared services. That is probably one of our biggest money savers. For example, we share a business administrator with a local district. We share a speech therapist. We share a computer person. We share our world languages person so that while the person would be full time it would be between two schools. So the person doing the work benefits and each of the schools benefits. So we do save quite a bit there in costs. We are very creative also in utilizing the staff that we have. Probably now 90% of District M's staff is mastered or above and so we are really qualified to do a lot of things and we have a very willing faculty and they take on different assignments even though that may not be their primary assignment but they are certified in it and so they do it. That is a way we have of cost saving technique that we have.

Respondent #17:

There were times in District N where we tried some things. We tried looping. The other small school in District N tried looping. That was almost impossible for me because we were so small that if we wanted to try looping, we would wind up looping all of the kids in both grades because there weren't enough sections. So if you had only two sections and you looped one, the others were looped automatically. You know, in some way they were staying together so I think that that, although it is a great concept, it was just absolutely impossible to do that. So, this combining of not combining of classes, but I think in small school you've got professionals that they have wonderful relationships, I mean the specials teachers with the classroom teachers and there was a lot of cross-curricular education going on. Like the gym teacher and the music teacher were always doing things together. The music teacher was always making music not only just for music class, but she was incorporating music into every celebration that we had in this school, things like that. I think that that again is more possible and I can't say that I did it. I think that it was just a function of who these people were and what their interests were. Case in point, the gym teacher who just retired last June, in my tenure at the school, we had three different music teachers, but the gym teacher always had that relationship with whoever the music teacher was and was always incorporating movement and music in everything that she did and in everything that happened in the school. I just can't say enough about it. It was absolutely fabulous. I mean the level of education.

Respondent #18:

Multi-tasking, like I just talked about. We have a host of stipended positions that range from supervision outside is a stipend. The person in charge of the I&RS committee; all of these extra curricular activities that we talked about and getting the yearbook done, having someone in the cafeterias just at lunchtime. I mean all of that is just for the logistical side. None of those are separate positions, so it is all added on top and of course there is compensation for it. Its um, definitely different than in a bigger district where you can really focus on one thing. When I was in the large district, I was in charge of testing. Well here the testing person also does curriculum, does 504's, does Special Ed., does Affirmative Action. You know it's everything.

Respondent #19:

Well, I do know that in the school that my children went and also in the school that I taught in Morrisville, that was I think probably in the order of 700 to 800 pupils seven through 12, you find a lot of teachers that were shared across grade levels, across departments and from building to building in a small school system. We have a full-time ESL teacher, 3 full-time Basic Skills teachers. They don't need to travel because they can stay here and that saves us in traveling time and other costs. I know that in my children's school the ESL teacher was not a permanent resident of the school. The Spanish teacher travels from place to place. The Basic Skills people travel and they then do not know the culture of the school nor do they know the children well so that's a problem. But you have to do it because you don't have enough to sustain the personnel.

Respondent #20:

It's one person doing the bulk of the positions. The only other thing we could do if we had to cut administrative costs would be to cut the other administrator, which is the assistant principal. Then you just need someone to pick up the pieces that that person does, which if you have someone in that position a while; they know the instruction, the curriculum. He does some of the observations; we split those. The day-to-day discipline things he takes care a lot of that. The expectations are that he is also trying to be an instructional leader and read and learn all of those pieces too and as I said before that is a learning curve. The Business Administrator is the business administrator and the school board secretary. Um, one of the Child Study Team secretaries helps her with some of the transportation issues and getting those mailings out. My secretary is also the school secretary. Predominately her job very honestly is the school secretary. That piece because she can't possibly do everything else. I do all of my own typing with everything that I do; it's just faster than writing it down and having somebody else type it up; it is more efficient. So we try with the small base of people that we have. If the Assistant Principal's position would go, then I would have to look at what teachers could pick up a few things here and there or have an assistant to the principal because then that would be in a different line item and that is just a game. You have to think quality. Is that really what you want? But honestly that's about all I could do. I did cut back when I first came the Assistant Principal had an eleven month contract. I said there is not need for that. I can do everything over the summer that's needed to get the school started so I did cut back to a 10-month salary position. Then your pool of candidates goes down too because there are people who want a 12-month position so it is a give and take there, but that is one way that we already tried to do some cost saving measures. I can't do with less than a Business Administrator because she has to pick up some other work. If we did, maybe three days a week and she picked something else up but with a building project perhaps. That falls squarely between the Superintendent and the Business Administrator. I can't have less than a person, because she needs to be here. So it's very hard to divvy up the responsibilities. I'm sure there are other small schools that when you speak with them, depending on how they divide it up, they might not do the Child Study Team piece and it would be nice to give that up, but you have to have somebody who is competent enough to do it and not land you in court. So we've worked with trying to cut costs that way and as I said I went from a 11-month position to 10 and that is probably as far down as I can go because I need some lead time at the end of the year because that is lead time into September for finishing up some projects or what not.

Question 8

*What types of organization practices have you used in your small schools?
b. In providing a competitive curriculum?*

Respondent #3:

I think the structure of how we approach curriculum and how we analyze it.

CB: ARE YOU ON A CYCLY OF ANY SORT?

Respondent #3:

Well, yes. We are on a five-year cycle so the curriculum never becomes stale and if we have an issue or if we feel the curriculum isn't working and we need to revise it sooner we do. We work hard with the articulation with Princeton so our children don't have difficulty moving from here over to Princeton High School. We do have a competitive math team with Math Counts and our kids do well with that. They also participate in Christian Brothers Academy. We have, particularly in the middle school, students need to have opportunities to explore and rather than provide recess for them, we provide twenty minutes of lunch and then we provide a twenty-five minute period that they get to select an activity like chess club or intramurals or old classics, music classics. We have an embroidery class. We have about 15 or 20 different clubs that they can join and that's what we did. We felt it worked much better than having unstructured recess where we had lots of discipline problems and at this the kids can relax and enjoy. There is not grade. They sign up and they do it on a quarterly basis and we give preference to the eighth graders first and fourth quarter, seventh graders second quarter and third quarter sixth graders. They get their first choice on those quarters. The other quarters, if their first choice is available, they may have that but they may not get it. You know, they may get their second or third choice.

CB: WHO SUPERVISES OR WHO RUNS THOSE?

Respondent #3:

Teachers do. We set up the teachers' schedules so that they can do that.

Respondent #4:

Ok, the current curriculum is we naturally because we send our students to District C, we have an articulation group that all of the sending districts the District H and the District C that all send to the regional high school, we meet on a weekly basis and we articulate with members from the regional high school to ensure that the curriculum that we are implementing number one you have to satisfy the New Jersey Department of Education Core Course Curriculum Standards, but we also don't want our students when they become ninth graders at the regional high school to be behind the eight ball. So we want to articulate with the regional high school to ensure our curriculum is aligned and what we have done is joined a consortium with all of the sending districts and we all kicked in \$7,000 per year to pay the salary of a curriculum coordinator. Her responsibility was to ensure that our curriculum was up to date and was aligned with the regional high school board of education.

Respondent #5:

Well using the standards on the web, we also research and look around at other districts in the area to see what they are doing. We touch base with our neighboring district. We have staff members who are part of the articulation and they go out to the meetings for the county and come back share it through those articulation meetings with language arts, math, social studies and science and technology, phys. Ed.

CB: AND DO YOU ARTICULATE WITH THE SENDING DISTRICTS TO EACH OF THOSE?

Respondent #5:

Correct. In fact, I just got involved with that as a principal last year to administrators articulation. They were just revisiting that. They had done away with that I guess because of turn over. So they re-instituted that.

CB: SO ALL THE SENDING SCHOOLS THEN SEND TO NORTH HUNTERDON?

Respondent #5:

Correct and what happens is through these articulation meetings they come together and talk about what they are doing at those levels. They were split elementary, middle at least for the administrators and now they combined it. The articulation I believe for North Hunterdon High I think it is six through twelve. I'm not sure it goes down as far as third grade, but because of our setup here, we are covered by that.

Respondent #7:

One of the things that I did in a small district was we had teams of teachers that were put together to revise and to take a look at their curriculum and to assess it for its effectiveness. What I did was basically set up a structure that they had to go through in order to do this. In other words they had to go through a process and the process first really started with them looking at lighthouse districts. In other words, identifying lighthouse districts and then visiting lighthouse districts and the reason I put that in was, I wanted them to become dissatisfied with what they had. I wanted to educate them of what was going on beyond the school district and so teams went out of staff members looking at school districts that had state-of-the-art language arts programs or math programs that were outstanding. I approved, first of all the districts, because I wanted to make sure that they were state-of-the-art and if they were state-of-the-art, then it was up to me to provide the resources, and in many cases an administrator would facilitate the group and attend. Then when they came back, we would open up a dialogue of what did they feel? What were the things that they were doing out there that could be implemented back in our district? Did they want to implement some of those things back in our district? That was the dialogue that took place and it was a healthy dialogue among professionals. If they felt that there was something out there needed to be modified and it would work, they were making the decision; they were making the recommendations. Over time there was the whole process of going through developing the curriculum. Sometimes, by the way, it was a matter of taking the curriculum that was developed already and just modifying it and not rewriting it. In some cases it was a big modification that had to be required and some cases by the way they went out and

took a look and they said you know, we're kind of comfortable with what we have and for these reasons they would state why it wasn't necessary really to make any major changes. In a lot of cases by the way, our curriculum has changed radically, but it was there decision and when it came time for implementation, they implemented it. They went to the teachers and the other staff members and said look this is good. We saw it and it works and now they would come to the administration and say we this type of staff development in order to do it. They were telling. We were telling each other, we were part of the group. The administration and the teachers were one and the same and that is the way that it should be a collaborative team effort because ultimately the teacher is going to be the one implementing it and if you don't involve them and they are not in the decision making mode, they are going to go into a district and they are going to basically take a curriculum and put it in their desk and close and they are going to teach anything they want. But if they feel part of it and they feel it is really meaningful, then it is theirs and there is ownership. I think that's important. So that is one example that I've used also in other small districts is the ownership and the collaboration. You can get rather insulated in a school, especially in a small school district or small community. Get them out to take a look around and provide the resources in order to do that and have faith in them. Let them fail. There is nothing wrong with failing if you learn something from your failure. Try a curriculum that may be on the cutting edge. Try a curriculum that maybe in the beginning the parents are not too thrill with, but ultimately you know you may make some great changes and I know that in this district that I am thinking of right now there were many, many areas that you know when we started out people were very critical. That's not going to work, but the teachers who were directly involved with developing it were the ones that made it work. The administration, by the way, could not have been able to dictate that. They had to be there facilitating and helping those teachers in order to implement it. Curriculum change takes at least five years. You can implement something and it will take you five years to have everybody in the district do it. What you need is a nucleus of people who really believe in it passionately and the only way that they can passionately believe in anything is if it is their recommendation, and their involvement and their ideas and their thinking. So you can do that much more effectively in small districts. Because as soon as you get large, you get big and you have layers of people, you have layers of bureaucracy and that creates turf wars and I have been in districts that have been large and you spend a lot of time trying to get things through all of the various layers. But in a small district, many times you can cut right through very, very quickly and be able to make some real change. Small districts can make change much more rapidly than a large district. A large district sometimes it would take ten years to change the culture. In a small district sometimes you can do it in three years, two years. District D was a good example by the way that changed rapidly in a very, very short space of time and it continues to change and that is really dynamic and kind of exciting to know that you can make those types of changes. So that is another strong suit in fact having things small and I think larger districts by the way can learn a lot from decentralizing and creating small learning communities. They can be small too by the way. You can be large in a sense and centrally from the top down, but if you create the small learning communities, you can really make a difference.

Respondent #8:

We have articulation. All four of the sending districts have representatives for each curriculum area and they meet three or four times a year at the high school with the high school department

chairs to make sure that we're all sending the kids to the district at the same level. So you know if sometimes we don't use the same books, we are philosophically we are going in the same place and the kids are basically, hopefully leaving here at the same level let's say in Algebra I in eighth grade or something like that and where we are as far as Social Studies in the content; Science the content there. Technology is the same thing. Where are the kids in Spanish? Are the kids ready for Spanish II when they go to high school? So we have meetings constantly with the regional high, as well as our sister schools. So that happens all the time.

CB: ARE THERE ANY PROFESSIONALS THAT YOU MIGHT SHARE ACROSS DISTRICTS IN FOR EXAMPLE THE SPECIALTY AREAS?

Respondent #8:

No, some districts do. Some districts our size do. We are lucky that we don't have to. We had to share a speech therapist for a while, Child Study Team. Usually in Special Ed. you look at those areas, but we are big enough that we can really maintain full time people in mostly every area. If you get a school that is probably 150 less than us, if you start talking at those groups, you'll see that they are sharing their foreign language teacher. They will be sharing a nurse from time to time. They might be sharing music, art, and those kinds of things. We are ok. If you talk to somebody a little smaller, you'll hear that.

Respondent #12:

Absolutely. Each of the districts spend a summer, usually a week in the summer developing a draft of the curriculum. Two years ago we did language arts. This year we are doing math. Next year it will be science. We have a five-year plan that we follow and each of the districts provides personnel to develop that. It is all connected to the Core Content Standards whatever the most current version that is out there and then it is developed in a user-friendly mode by the teachers for use by other teachers. Drafts are brought back and shared with colleagues. It is refined over the course of that year and then a final draft is approved and then voted upon. Materials are still each district's choice, however the philosophy, the outline, and the program itself is consistent so that when our eighth graders join the other districts at the high school, we know educationally there is a seamless process.

Respondent #13:

That's critical. That's one thing I've noticed with the cooperation and I don't get involved in this but I've been very impressed with it that every one of the four participating districts that sends to our high school. They all have of course had their own to enter. They want all their students to enter the high school all on an equal footing and so that is really critical and support for the high school so that they don't have to do remedial from this district because the districts have the same kind of standards.

Respondent #16:

Well, I just described what we have so we're able to do that. I repeat it's our faculty and the fact that we share and the value that our parents and our board of education has placed upon that. And we try to do whatever it is we have to do to maintain that. We have been successful thus far. I don't know what the future will bring because it seems to me that um, it's getting more and

more difficult to do that, but right now we are able to maintain it. I think one of the biggest obstacles is the Special Ed. piece that it has become so costly and if it is necessary to have special placement then you just can't come up with the money in a small school. It is always \$50,000 or more and where do you come up with that especially now since the state is saying you can't go over more than two and a half percent. Next year it will be 2% over cap so it is very hard, very difficult.

Respondent #17:

There were times in District N where we tried some things. We tried looping. The other small school in District N tried looping. That was almost impossible for me because we were so small that if we wanted to try looping, we would wind up looping all of the kids in both grades because there weren't enough sections. So if you had only two sections and you looped one, the others were looped automatically. You know, in some way they were staying together so I think that that, although it is a great concept, it was just absolutely impossible to do that. So, this combining of not combining of classes, but I think in small school you've got professionals that they have wonderful relationships, I mean the specials teachers with the classroom teachers and there was a lot of cross-curricular education going on. Like the gym teacher and the music teacher were always doing things together. The music teacher was always making music not only just for music class, but she was incorporating music into every celebration that we had in this school, things like that. I think that that again is more possible and I can't say that I did it. I think that it was just a function of who these people were and what their interests were. Case in point, the gym teacher who just retired last June, in my tenure at the school, we had three different music teachers, but the gym teacher always had that relationship with whoever the music teacher was and was always incorporating movement and music in everything that she did and in everything that happened in the school. I just can't say enough about it. It was absolutely fabulous. I mean the level of education.

Respondent #18:

Well what we have done here and in what we call our cluster, because we send to District T High School. There are five districts that do that; in fact, they have a cluster meeting this after noon. We have a curriculum coordinator for all five districts. So each district kicks in \$2,000 and pays this person a \$10,000 stipend to write the curriculum. She also works with teachers in the other districts. So even though we may have separate books, we address the same curriculum so that when our kids go to the high school, they're all in the same curriculum. So what many districts may do as part of a intradistrict, we do interdistrict where you might have administrators meet maybe with a team of five or seven within a district. We get together the five of us.

CB: IS THIS AN EMPLOYEE OF ONE OF THE FIVE DISTRICTS?

Respondent #18:

Yes, she is my 504 and curriculum person. We pay \$2,000 and then she goes and coordinates the curriculum with all the sending districts.

CB: YOU ARE THEN MAINTAINING THE CONTINUITY?

Respondent #18:

Right, right and yet the uniqueness of your own district because we just purchased a new reading series Houghton/Mifflin that not every other district uses, but we use it and it addresses the same curriculum.

CB: AND WHAT CURRICULAR AREAS DOES SHE ADDRESS?

Respondent #18:

She's doing language arts now. They had done math a few years ago. When they did the math they used somebody out of Rutgers, but that was the only time they used a consultant. But she's doing language arts now. She's done social studies so each of the areas and I think they are getting ready to do science. All of them will be aligned.

Respondent #19:

Hum, if you are in a small school system you have a shallow pool of talent and knowledge perhaps unless you get very lucky and you have a person who is knowledgeable about many things and who has an interest in curriculum development. I think that the curriculum in the schools that I worked in and in my son's school is not well researched. It's kind of more like an outline. It's certainly tied to the standards, but I don't think it is maybe as dynamic as it could be and I think that when you have few people sort of looking at the same issue you might have the situation where the strongest of the few people kind of directs the flow of everything and that was true in the school that I worked in Morrisville. The veteran teacher pretty much dictated the curriculum and they were the go to person and that was fine. They just wanted the job done. Here and in the school that I worked in last, the teachers were very much involved. There was a very wide and deep pool of talent and knowledge to draw from which was good and they were used and here too. I think because of the size. Having said that getting the word out, maintaining congruence and making certain that the teachers stick to it and I think first of all understand it requires the kind of personal interaction that becomes very difficult here. Having served as the Director of Humanities for three years, it also took me three years to get to every single person. We have nearly 500 people here; 250 of them are teaching social studies. There is no way that I can personally meet 250 people and make sure they understand the curriculum. If teachers don't understand the curriculum, they can't teach it in the way that you intended it. So while you have a talent pool you also have a talent drain maybe and a lot of curriculum deviance. I don't see that in small school much at all. In fact I don't know that I liked my teaching in that small school where I was because you kind of had to fit in and here I mean you can almost disappear on the landscape and do what you want. I like the freedom, but from the perspective of an administrator, I would want to make sure that everyone was teaching at least similarly, something close to what we had intended.

Respondent #20:

And that's a challenge; I have to also be the curriculum coordinator. I do have some key people on staff when we have articulation meetings with the high school cluster. I have one teacher who teaches social studies at the middle level, science, math and two with language arts split. So they are my key people with going to those meetings. Then we have to align with the standards. We do curriculum writing in the summer and that's rewriting. We have to work with people with their prep periods, you know before or after school to see what we can do with those pieces too. It's difficult and honestly this isn't meant in terms of complaining, it is just factual but that is

how it works. We try to be very competitive. I teach a college class. I feel that gives me more validity amongst my staff members. I teach a class of reading instruction, an undergraduate class. It's not that I have all the time in the world to do it, it's really a way to give back and it also forces me to be extremely current. It makes me more credible to my staff when I do workshops in the summer or teach the class at night because they know the information I am giving to them is the current information out there. They know I am credible and that I know what I am talking about so instructional practices should be there. We try very hard, and that's why I said our schools are good, we don't have as many kids in the advanced proficient as I wished could be. We just have to push that a little bit harder so when you talk about turnkey if you send my math teacher out and he and I went to a program on data interpretation at Rutgers this summer. So the expectation is that he saw the numbers. He saw where our scores were. He needs to be more of a key person with my elementary grades so they know what has to happen throughout and then there's time. He has no time in his schedule except his prep period and you want him to prepare for class too so it's a money issue again. I am very blessed here because I have a lot of teachers who work very, very hard and give a lot of their time because they want to become better. So we get there. I try to have study groups, but again you are pulling from the same group of people so you have to watch how much you are asking your staff to do too. That can be a challenge. I tend to be very hyper and I like things done yesterday. I don't give that attitude to my staff, you know oh this wasn't finished yet, but sometimes I look at myself and say gosh. Have we come anywhere in three years? People tell me we have and I am pleased with what I've seen and how we've grown, but there are pieces that I thought would be there. You know you mainstream a child for example and someone says gosh, this isn't working and explain to them wait a minute, we talked all about that. We talked about the strategies. Why isn't it working? It should be working. Did you miss that workshop and they are good people. I do mean really good.

Respondent #21:

Well, you really have to be creative. In District Q we went out to consortia and did all of our buying of paper supplies and those kinds of things. We also worked with meeting the needs of our Special Education students by having them serviced by outside sources. You really have to look at the organization and find ways to do things that you need to do with less and we did. Sometimes it was better than others, but the school is still thriving today as I remember it when I went there.

Question 9

“Economy of scale” is the idea that you can reduce your production cost by increasing the size of the facility. Have you been able to use economy of scale in any way in your school? How so?

Respondent #1:

I think that there is a balancing act that they have to do with the economy of scale, which to me is the larger, the school district, the cheaper it is because you are able to put more kids into a school district. You are able to fit more kids into a classroom perhaps. The only problem with that is that you are losing out on a lot of the hands on between the teachers and the students. You are giving up the individual approach to the students. It becomes very difficult to maintain. I think with a lot of aids in the class, if you are talking about school districts that have 30 students in the classroom as opposed to 20 students in the classroom. You have economy of scale with 30 students in the classroom, but the educational process has got to be weakened.

Respondent #1:

The big problem with the school districts is primarily the parents. The parents want the small classes for their kids. They are pushing the various school boards of education to keep the students per classroom to a minimum 20 in most of my school districts is what they are looking for. They want to have a small class. They like that hands-on with the teachers. From my experience, what's happened to most of the communities here in the county that people that are moving in are moving in because of the quality of the education. It increases the value of their homes. It attracts them to the community. They don't mind the extra costs I don't think as long as it is a reasonable extra cost. Plus, the fact that most of my school districts have proven that the extra costs has bought the homeowners in town where they have good educational programs, the kids move onto higher education with little difficulty. It is money that we have found to be well spent.

Respondent #2:

Um, no not really. I mean basically, what we have done each year we look at where we are headed, what we are doing. Give the teachers the opportunity to have input as to what they need. We see what our needs are and we build a budget around that and again just running a real sound fiscal management. I mean you know we're not elaborate. We don't have elaborate offices. We don't take trips to national conventions every year. You know, we believe the money belongs in the classroom with the kids. So if you follow that practice and you believe in that we don't drive expensive cars and that is just the way it is. I don't think you need to look at all kinds of business theories of how to do it. You know, in a small district, I'm sure in a large district it is a little more complex. I mean you take look at the Abbots and the problems they've had to financially manage it and that is a whole other bureaucracy.

Respondent #3:

Well, we are a one school district and what happens was when we needed to add additional space, we decided to stay in one school and use the core facility. So we beefed up the core

facility and added the classrooms to that rather than keeping the core facility and making an elementary school K-5 and then opening up a middle school and I think we would have lost the whole philosophy that we have that we're a community as a whole and that the attitudes that we expect are across the board. If we had just put the middle school kids together, I think we would have opened up a can of worms and we would have seen a much different environment than we see today.

Respondent #4:

Yes, we are big on economy of scale at the consortium. This is what we preach and if we could get all of the districts in The county to understand what we are talking about, we could even reduce the costs because when you have a county this size, if everyone were to be members of our consortium and everyone purchased for example fuel oil from us and telephone services from us, if everyone purchased IT services from us, we could clearly lower the cost of T1 lines to the infrastructure that's needed to develop technology, but school districts that want to go it alone that don't become members, they are in essence keeping the costs higher. Whereas if they would join with the consortium, but the county is unique in that it's really the starting ground for if you will, for many chief school administrators. This is where they get their start. So when they come in as chief school administrators for many of them it is their first position as a superintendent and truthfully Christine they are overwhelmed by the responsibility of being a chief school administrator because in many case they are both chief school administrator and building principal so they are doing evaluations. They're preparing budgets. They're meeting with their board. They're meeting with their sub-committees for curriculum and buildings and grounds. Their day is pretty complete and often times when we go to their round table meetings and we discuss some of the services that the CONSORTIUM can provide, you can see the glazed look on their face that it sounds real good, but I haven't had the time to really look into it. So we haven't had the real buy in of all of the school districts in the county and I mean if in fact we could get that buy in and everyone could realize that the consortium is here to help us, it would really truly help to reduce their costs. And as time goes on, we are starting to see more and more people do that. Our technology division has expanded to the point where now we probably have 9 members in our consortium and by that I mean that we provide all of their infrastructure for their technology. We provide their internet services. In some cases we provide all of their telephone services and they are beginning to realize that they are saving money, but once again if we had everybody on board we could save everybody even more money. So we are well aware of economy of scales. We preach that that is our credo, but it is a tough sell because it is a transient district. It is a transient county where people move. When I was county superintendent for the two years I was in that position of the thirty superintendents, we turned over 15 superintendents in two years. And the superintendents leave and go to maybe the Montgomery's or the Springfield's or the Bridgewater-Raritan's. They get the experience here in the county, do a good job and go onto bigger and better things and then you get some people with not quite the experience that they had and they are trying to field their way and by the time they realize well I could be utilizing the consortium to provide more services and cheaper product, it is time for them to leave in some cases.

Respondent #5:

The only thing I can think of is when we purchased our computers, we just purchased 40 or so computers, to get a reduced rate, and I used our neighboring district because we went through

Neil Charles again. However, the vendor didn't know the size of our school. So, when I went to order those I said I would be ordering more next year but didn't give him a number and he reduce it right away thinking that the school might have been a large school. Had I explained the size of the school, it would have been a little bit different. So, yes and no. I didn't have to do that, but I can see that happening, but when we talk about textbooks, is another area. Um, that is when we're at a reduced cost. We just did our parking lot; I'm going on to facility now, not instruction, but a different angle. We used a local person who was willing to beat everybody else's price and did a wonderful job. So, it is a tough thing to say. It might work on some things and I think you can get around with it at other ways too.

CB: SO YOU HAVE SOME OF THOSE CONTACTS BEING IN A SMALL TOWN?

Respondent #5:

Our board members and everybody seems to know somebody else so our board members legally work through the system to find individuals who will do it on a different scale.

Respondent #6:

Well, what I did was in order to demonstrate that our students could compete against the traditional public schools, I had a class size of 25, knowing that if I had a class of ten, they district would say, anybody can get high performance when there are only ten in a class. So I always had 25 because I wanted to demonstrate that it was something other than ten. I did get around that a little bit by having a second teacher in the classroom so I'm really at 12.5 ratio, but there is only one lead teacher and there is only one lead teacher being paid teacher's salaries. I also have paid the assistant teacher out of my Title I funds so it wasn't draining on the taxpayer base. So I think one can economize by looking at the supplementary staff and employing them in a more efficient way and so I have no pullout. I do an additional tutoring after school and I pay by the hour for that kind of tutoring. Saturday I pay by the hour. The contract they have is eleven months so it is expected of them.

Respondent #7:

Well, I think that that is the biggest fallacy that we have had in education that we are not running schools like factories. We're a school and we are not making widgets and the fact that large is better is not so. Large actually works against what we want to do. It is great in a factory and sometimes by the way it's not so great in factory either. You know factories now are starting to realize that what we need to do is decentralize and empower our workers and create small units, independent units who can be creative be able to look at different solutions. I think if you look at some systems that have occurred around the world and some countries, you have centralized schools in China. I just recently traveled to China and I learned something about their school system. China is very top down organization and now they are realizing we are not getting creativity, we are not getting kids to think. It is very much teacher directed and the kids are not challenging. I picked up a paper in China that happened to be translated into English and they were saying that their experimental school was to encourage kids to challenge the teacher. Challenge the answer. Look at the textbooks. Be critical and I am saying to myself, Wow! This is what is wrong if we have these widgets. They were using kids and the teachers as factory model. Now they realize they can't compete in a global society without kids being able to critically think and if they can't critically think, then they are not going to be able to survive. I

give a lot of credit by the way to the Chinese leadership for the fact that they recognize that and it is also a risk on their part because once they start to get people to think, ok, and get people to challenge, maybe they'll start challenging the system that they have and I don't know if they've thought that far ahead, but that is the logical consequence when you start giving people more freedom and you start encouraging them to think for themselves. So, this whole idea of economy of scale came in and it is a dinosaur and it definitely doesn't work and it doesn't work for schools and it's really a tragedy that people continue to linger with that saying that we have to have economy of scale. I see that some of that is occurring with the policies in this state looking to save money. You know we have to economize. We have a governor who has been pushing this and these governors all over the country because they now have taken the agenda away from educators and they are now are going to be running the school systems indirectly through policies and through money and this is a disastrous effect. Eventually it is going to run its course and eventually it is going to fail and then maybe we can get down to what we know was working and it should be based on research. You know we should do everything based on what we know through research, not through the way we feel it should be or politically it should be. What does the research tell us and the research is not telling us that the factory model is the best for kids.

CB: THINGS MIGHT INCLUDE BULK BUYING.

Respondent #8:

Oh, ok we do do that. We purchase things through a central agency and sometimes you can do that with insurance as well and purchasing of technology equipment and those kinds of things.

CB: HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO DO THE INSURANCE THAT WAY BEING THAT YOU HAVE A LARGE ENOUGH SYSTEM? SOME SCHOOLS I'VE TALKED WITH HAVE SAID THAT IT THE INSURANCE COMPANIES WOULDN'T WORK WITH THEM SINCE THEY WERE TOO SMALL?

Respondent #8:

Right, we do it actually through the state. There is a state co-op and there is also another agency that rights some of our liability insurance that other groups of people are in. We do the same thing with electricity. A lot of schools do that as well.

CB: DO HAVE ANYTHING WITH REGARD TO FOUNDATIONS ANY WAY IN WHICH IT WOULD BE OUTSIDE THE TAXES?

Respondent #8:

We have an ed. foundation that probably contributes about \$15,000 or \$20,000 a year to our school through various fundraisers. Our PTA is very active and provides assembly programs and those kinds of things. So they are working real hard raising money as well.

Respondent #9:

Well I mean if you look at it, we don't have a national curriculum and there is a reason for that it just doesn't reproduce. I think if you are dealing with students as clones of each other, then you

can have Model T cars the same as the next Model T car, but students are unique individuals and the curriculum to some extent. So I think that there is some truth in having all these reports. We have to do a staff development plan. We have to a technology plan. There is always these plans that you have to do and a lot of times I would say, are you going to have time to do it or have time to write the plan, but I don't have time to do both. So often times something I don't have a plan, but I don't spend a lot of time writing the plan. It is only up to me to implement it and I can have a beautiful plan and not do anything with it. But my time is constrained. So, if there was one plan written for all of us for technology or staff development, it would be time saving and in some ways consolidating into one district would reduce the report level that we would have to do to the state. It is an incredible amount of work to keep up with it all and to keep on top of it, to get all the reports done and um, we are all doing our own little report. I think that could be consolidated and would save some administrative time, but when you are talking about it on a personal student level, I don't you can just duplicate it and have a large school and get the same results as good as we can.

Respondent #10:

I think Respondent #9 hit it the nail right on the head. The economy of scale, you know we are not a factory producing, you know, General Motors cars. We are dealing unique children. I think the two pieces that your role as an educator and economy of scale just grates against, like the nails on the chalkboard. It is really an ignorant statement when people talk about students. However, from the business side of it, of course if there is a way, you heard the perfect answer from us. There are many, many plans that the same K-12 district that has 10,000 children have to write the same plans the K-6 district with 200 children have to write and they are not being penalized for administrative costs and yet they have fifteen administrators doing this job, where it is all down to the one administrator building. So, there is a frustration level that yes the time it takes to prepare these reports and get them accepted at the county and state level is time away from you going into the classroom and team teaching or watching the curriculum implementation that you worked on, but I do believe that should be sometime of economy of scale when it comes to the reports and making it a bigger; one report for the county; one report for the sending districts. You know the K-12 sending districts. I think that would help the cause as well and economy of scale is really something that political figures use to taxpayers and until school funding reform is done in New Jersey, people are going to talk about rebating taxes and it is all a game and it's really not talking about the real issue is. I don't like my real estate tax bill when it comes in and the pie graph shows 89% is being funded by my taxes and so I am an educator and I understand where it comes from and how it comes from, so if we feel that way when we get our tax bill, then the rest of New Jersey must feel twice as frustrated. School tax reform is the answer in New Jersey, not these phony rebates and 2.5 spending caps that politicians are saying to get re-elected.

Respondent #10:

There are two things that need to be done. One is, you need to rework the algorithm that shows what efficiency is. If numbers are being crunched into an algorithm that spits out a per pupil cost of \$11,000 dollars versus \$8,000, yet those districts are spending \$200 million versus \$2 million, I mean there is something wrong with the algorithm. If you gave any of us 100 more students, if there was a development that could go up in our neighborhoods, our per pupil costs would be down to that as well. So, it is a numbers game and it is critical that the algorithm be switched or

we attract more students. I think the backwards thinking is that if you can't attract more students, we are going to swoosh all of you together and that will give you more students and that is the frustrating part that we all do the same. We are all hitting the ground and shoveling snow and doing our thing in the classrooms everyday as superintendents of schools. Well that is a unique thing. I am very proud as well to say I can get into every classroom everyday and be the superintendent of schools. That is a really cool thing to be able to say you are able to do. So, it is a numbers algorithm crunch that we are being used as pawns to deal with the New Jersey taxpayers frustration.

Respondent #11:

I can't imagine we could be more effective or more efficient than we are. I really can't. You have to be a unique individual to be in a school like this. It was funny, when the board talked to me about other people that interviewed when I was being hired; nine out of ten people wanted the central office in a building away from children and that kind of stuff. That is not effective and efficient from the perspective of hands-on, what is going on with kids, what is going on with curriculum, what is going on with instruction and being in the classroom all the time and that kind of thing. We take a lot of money and make it go very far. If you look at the test scores and look at the kids we have, our kids are doing terrific, terrifically well. I am the principal; I am the superintendent; I'm the chief cook and bottle washer, not everybody can do that. I love that. I am not bragging. I am just saying that in a small school, you need a special kind of person to do that kind of thing together, but I can't imagine too much that we could do that would make us more effective and efficient at our level.

Respondent #11:

There are significant days for example, where we can't subs, so we're the teacher and that is terrific for us because you get to know the children better.

Respondent #12:

Probably in terms of our pre-school program. We have two pre-school programs. We have a pre-school handicap class and we also have regular pre-school we offer at no charge to our community for three and four year olds. So we actually start educating our students at age three. They are here for two days a week and our four year olds are here for three days a week and then they follow right into kindergarten, which is right now a part day because we have two sections. We used to have extended day and we'll change that based on the number of kids coming in each year. The idea there is we have always educated those kids. We have asked the state can we count those students, because we are not getting funding for them and they said yes we can. So now, if you look at our district historically the per pupil cost, you'll see that it's on the higher side up until this year and the only difference this year is, we are counting students we have always been educating. So when you say the economy of scale, I think of it in a little different terms than the traditional way, but I believe that's the kind of things that we can do. We try to do that when we have a need for a program we try to decide whether it is educational and is it going to be efficiently run. So we think about it in those regards, but I think the other side of the coin is, is it educationally beneficial and there is a point of no return. So you can get so economy of scale that you are mass-producing and doing things very efficiently, but maybe not effectively and I think that's the other piece of that that has to be there. In a small school you don't lose the

sight of the fact because if you forget for anyone, you've got parents and staff and people in the community reminding you at every turn that you've missed something and that's really a great checks and balance that built in. So I see as a balancing act. I don't see it as a one-way street, but I think you always think about it. The examples I gave you earlier are probably that the staff development. I have 20 staff members. I could not afford to bring in a guest speaker, but if we all pulled our resources as a larger regional district we can do that so the economy of scale works for that. You look for those things. Off the top of my head, I don't think I can think of any others.

Respondent #12:

We offered other schools and other people to pay tuition to come here for our pre-school programs because our numbers are so low and in our pre-school handicap class we can take a few more kids before we are even close to the level but we still provide a good educational program and it be cost effective. So we have offered that. Last year we did have a regular pre-schooler come from another township. So we are also are creating some revenue on the other side of the scale and it still relates to the economy of scale. Larger districts don't have to watch them anywhere nearly as close as we do.

Respondent #13:

I'm the responsible party in terms of the classic economy of scale, but I also come from an economics background where there are diseconomies of scale Newark being one of the most notable in the state. Economy of scale in small districts just assure that they are putting the absolute maximum number of dollars into their education are forced to look outside their own districts for that and we participate in a number of places. Electricity, we are in a statewide and a lot of this comes from the professional associations so I'm not taking credit for this. In small districts, the professional organizations well let me give you specific examples. Electricity there is a consortium statewide for small districts called ACES. It's the Alliance for Competitive Energy Services, but it's basically like for electrical power. We had the option a few years back with the deregulation to get the different supplier than the local one and so this particular entity bids, gathers together all the electrical requirements and says OK I've got 5 billion kilowatts of power I need. How much? Our district gets about 1,000 of those, buy we get the benefit of the price same thing with the fuel oil. We are part of the fuel oil consortium. We get a bid that is based on tens of thousands of gallons of fuel oil and maybe we use 5,000 a heating season, but we get the benefit of paying like on the spot market. The local residents here last winter were paying upwards of a dollar and a half a gallon for fuel oil. We were getting it for between \$.99 and a dollar ten. So we were would have murdered our budget if hadn't been in this consortium. Insurance especially workman's comp insurance has been rising rather rapidly over the last several years where again we're in a consortium sponsored by the New Jersey School Boards Association. We're on a select pool that gathers together all of its insurance requirements and as a result of that we get a lot better risk management help, which causes us to reduce our workman's comp incidences and secondly we get a break on the premium where they lock in the rates for a certain periods of years. Even with our small budget we literally save several thousands of dollars in the last couple of years by being a part of the consortium. For the property insurance we are in another consortium called the School Alliance Insurance Fund that's SAIF and again that is for property and liability. It's a different consortium underwritten

by a different company and the same thing applies. We are not going and getting rates based on, you know, a little single school. We're getting rates based on a hundred schools. You want you insure a hundred schools; you give all the hundred schools the break as though they were in one district and so we get that. State health benefits plan we're in, which is a statewide plan. Everybody pays the same rate statewide for the state health benefits plan, not that that has been all that great in terms of price increases, but relatively. If we had to go it alone and get health insurance, we would have a very difficult time affording it right now.

Respondent #13:

Yes that's right state health benefits. Let's see where else? Transportation, our Special Ed. we have a state obligation again mostly unfounded if we have a Special Education student that needs to go outside our district to go for Special Educational needs, special therapy or something, we're responsible for paying for the transportation. If we had a student and we had to hire a bus driver and a bus and we've done this, it can cost us \$20,000 a year just to send one child just in transportation. Instead we go to a northern district and we say we've got three kids. One has got to go there and one has got to go there and one has got to go there. All the schools go to District J in the county and then what they do is they develop a route that says OK I've got six kids going to that and instead of us paying the whole cost of the route, we pay one-sixth the cost of the route. You know, so that very much benefits us.

Respondent #13:

I just thought of this with the sharing of the music teacher. We just hired a part-time music teacher. We can't afford a full-time music teacher. We need a music teacher three days a week. Another school needed a teacher two days a week. Walla! We get him for three days and that school is gets him for two and we are thinking about doing that in other ways. He's been the initiator trying to say hey let's share this teacher and both of us get a break on it and the teacher wants to be a full-time teacher, would not have come here for three days a week if there wasn't this sharing arrangement. So we get a good person and we get a prorated share of what the total cost of what it would normally be. So there are a lot of ways. When they say small schools inefficient, well maybe in some areas, but there are a lot of ways that small school districts are as efficient in fact maybe much more efficient. We watch dollars here. I was in a larger district and we spilt more money on the floor than we have in total here to run this district. It's the difference between having a \$75 million budget versus a \$4 million. Over there the spillage was more and I'm not saying they didn't do a good job managing, because I was part of it and they did. I mentioned the transportation for Special Education that is in the neighboring district and I view that in the same way. We also have gone outside the county. The consortium has been very aggressive. It's almost like a business itself and we get all our school supplies through them. In other words we tell them how many pads and pencils and paperclips we need. They bid the whole thing for us and then we get a bid booklet back. So instead of paying \$1.50 for a highlighter, we pay \$.82 for a highlighter. The consortium has been an integral part of our supplies.

Respondent #14:

It is very difficult for us to use economy of scale in terms of the instructional program, because what you see is what you get. However, we use economy of scale by participating on the business side of the operation in larger consortia. For example, when we buy school supplies,

we participate in the county bid for school supplies, so all 29 districts in The county bid on the consumable supplies that we all have, like paper and pencils, etc. So, we get the best economy of scale when we are talking about 23,000 or 25,000 children whatever is in the county. We are using that price for instructional supplies. We also use that in terms of fuel oil. We're in on that with respect to the concept of economy of scale when we order fuel oil for the winter. We get in on the county bid and I think it was set last year at \$0.87 a gallon, which when you look at the fluctuating costs of fuel oil over the winter, we wind up on the good side of that bid. Sometimes you don't wind up on the good side because for whatever the market forces are will create that fluctuation and sometimes you win and sometimes you lose. So, those are the two factors that come to mind when we talk about economy of scale. One of the other areas that we wanted to do it in, in terms of the economy of scale, is medical or health coverage, but we are too small. Nobody will take us because we are too small. So, years ago when you could do it, when it was something you could do, we were self insured up to certain threshold of the deductible amount, but you can't do that any longer.

Respondent #15:

I don't want to keep beating up on the shared services, but I think that is really the most difficult thing for a small district is by state law you are required to have a superintendent or chief school administrator and a business administrator and you know you have to be able to provide Child Study Team services. So, the more students you can have underneath that, the more economical per student it is and for us we have gotten beat up in the newspaper because they look at the cost per pupil. Ours was always very high. If you look at ours now, it's not as high it was before and if you look at our administrative costs specifically per child, it is way down. We wouldn't even show up, you know, as a red flag at all in that area. I think by not impacting directly in the classroom and sharing those services administratively, we have taken advantage of the economies of scale without changing the environment in the classroom. Hopefully we will be able to continue that way.

CB: YOU'RE SAYING THE COST PER PUPIL WAS AFFECTED BY THE SHARED SERVICES ARRANGEMENT?

Respondent #15:

Yes, the state average cost per pupil is probably somewhere in the \$9,000 range if I had to throw a number out. I can tell you that a couple of years ago, we were somewhere in the vicinity of \$17,500. We were also charging tuition of like \$1,500 and parents would ask well why are you charging \$1,500 tuition for out-of-district students if it costs \$17,500? It really gets back to economy of scale. To try to simplify it for neighbors, I explained that if you have two houses next to each other. Both of them need oil to heat them. One is just a husband and wife and the other has a family of four. The cost to per person to heat the house is the same, but it is less per person. So you're really not spending less next-door than you are here, but it just looks like you are spending less here and it is the same for us. We only have 92 students and you break that down per child for things we need to have in place. We have to have a teacher in every room. We have to have a nurse. We have to have a secretary. So the costs seem very high. We can't eliminate any of those positions. Really the only other choice we would have is to close the school. That is the only way and we have looked at that too. That was a year and a half ago or two years ago that we were pretty close to that decision.

CB: ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY OTHER TIMES WHERE THERE WERE CONSIDERATIONS TO REGIONALIZE OR CONSOLIDATE WITH ANOTHER SCHOOL?

Respondent #15:

The thought was to send all of our students to another district. And there was a lot of community pressure to look at doing that. It is easy to look at the districts around you especially when they are Blue Ribbon Awards and think that is, you know, if you are getting a blue ribbon then you must be the best of the best and it certainly demonstrates something. I'm not exactly sure what it all really means, but we are being held to that standard and as well with state testing scores and that's what really what led to some community outcry to send our students elsewhere and you try to explain that when you have eight children in a classroom and two of them don't test well, that really doesn't look good. You've got 25% of your class that is below average or whatever it turns out to be and if you have a class of 28 and 4 don't test well, you don't look that bad. So, you can't really compare us to other districts, but parents still want to do that. When the numbers come out in the newspaper and you look at them and say well our kids aren't getting a good education. They're not testing well and there was a lot of pressure to want to send our kids to another district and we talked to the other district and they're having their own problems with space and they couldn't accept our students. So not that we were necessarily going to do that, but we were exploring all of the options. Once you send, you no longer have direct control. We would not represent a large enough percentage to sit on their board and make decisions and they would be making decisions like building new schools and things like that and we would have to pay a cost per child. So there is no guarantee that our taxes would go down. In fact, the numbers that we ran showed that they would likely go up because if you look at the average cost of the house in our town and the average cost of a home in Our neighboring district, they are paying more in taxes than we are. Granted they have more community services than we do, but from a school standpoint, we certainly wouldn't see a tax decrease by sending our children elsewhere.

CB: HOW ABOUT ALSO THE FACILITY ITSELF? WHAT WAS THE CONCERN ABOUT THE FACILITY ITSELF?

Respondent #15:

Well that definitely factored into it because we have a twenty-year mortgage, if you will, for our building when it was built and I was not a member of this community when the community decided that they wanted a new school. Obviously there was enough support to approve that so we at that point we had eight years left on our mortgage. So another cost to consider, we spend about \$200,000 a year on our debt for the school. So that is about 10% of our budget goes toward the debt of the school and that will be gone in another seven years. So that is another seven years that we pay it and if we send all of our students out, we're still obligated to pay that bond of \$200,000 a year and we have the building. Could we rent it out? We could potentially rent it out, who knows to what or for what and is that what we want in our community?

Respondent #16:

Um, District M is a river town. It doesn't draw many people to the river because most people today want sprawling places to live. We do have surrounding areas in our region where there is

sprawl and so a lot of the people move there. However, we are as a small school, while we are not increasing our facility, we are looking outside of our facility. For the first time we have a few tuition students and we also have a pre-school that 90% of the pre-school is out-of-district. So they are again paying tuition so we have that ability to do.

CB: AND YOU HAVE DONE THAT JUST RECENTLY?

Respondent #16:

Yes, I didn't show you the pre-K. I will as we go out. Actually, last year was our first year and we started with six students and in that class there were four of our own District M students so they didn't pay anything, but outside we had two. One was from Pennsylvania and I can't remember the other ones. This year we have 11 and we have five more on the waiting list. We only accepted 11, but the program really took off because word of mouth for a small school is the best way to advertise and we really have a bang up program in there. So we had to rearrange our classroom to provide for our pre-schoolers. So we now have 11 and as I said 90% of them are out of district. We didn't have any inside people who brought their kids because they would have to pay too.

Respondent #17:

I think that first of all, I do not believe that taking a model from industry is not a good thing. I don't think you can run a school like a business. It is not a business. It is a very, very different kind of a thing and I think that yes you increase the size of the facility and you get some economies, but there is a breaking point and again my only experience is in elementary school as far as being an administrator, but I honestly believe that first of all you can back it down to the classroom like how big is big enough and how big is too big in an elementary classroom. I mean I have very strong feelings about the size of those classes and again yeah, when you increase the size of the facility you can accommodate more kids and have a better library and a better gym and a better this and a better that but I think that the intangibles that you are sacrificing may not be visible immediately, but eventually I think you are going to pay a price for that. Um, and I think that that is happening in the one school in C. It has just gotten so large that you know that it's not sort of elementaryish anymore.

CB: HOW MANY STUDENTS ARE THERE?

Respondent #17:

They're probably over 600 now K through 3 I would say. I mean C is going through, I mean they are going to have to do another referendum because they're overcrowded everywhere and we just finished adding onto every building in the district and they did a little redistricting as I said for this school year but the problem is that people want to move into C because they have good schools and they have the midtown direct to the city. So it is an ideal location, but I also have to say that our Special Ed. department has a very good reputation and people with Special Ed. children will deliberately move into C and you know what? I would do the same thing, you know, if I had a special needs child. So, I think economy of scale is a top priority or a good thing in a school. I don't.

Respondent #18:

We have participated in that with our town. In fact we are in the process of getting our parking lot paved in conjunction with them. They are paving a lot of the streets, so they went out to bid for us with the contractor and that price came in much lower than what we were able to do on our own. I know we have some shared services with other districts. Curriculum is a good example of one, how we have somebody to do that because we can't afford to pay a curriculum coordinator on our own. I think they are looking into going some kind of a purchasing jointure. I am not that familiar. My businessperson might know more about that, but I guess those are the types of things. So mainly it is our curriculum and now as we are starting with the town. We also had to use two rooms in the municipal building for our business office that we provided the internet for the whole municipal building including the library and then they gave us the rooms rent free. So it is that type of thing. I think it is more formed by relationships around here than brought on by costs to foster relationships more than anything.

Respondent #19:

Certainly when you have 1,500 children and you get \$7,000 per child from the state or whoever it is it comes from, the taxes. You have a lot more cash to throw around. You can hire more experienced teachers. Pay them more. You can get all kinds of materials and provide them with opportunities that may not be able to provide if you don't live in an affluent suburban community. We certainly can offer more to children in every area. In a smaller school the only economy of scale you can achieve is by maybe connecting with another small school in the same district or in another district. You know, do some shared services such as transportation or the purchase of textbooks maybe could be shared something like that. The junior-senior high school where I worked and also the K through 6 school that I worked in Trenton did share services. They shared purchasing with other schools. So it is doable. It just takes a lot more coordination I think and willingness for people to do that. Here not a problem. I will tell you in the school I taught in last, economy of scale was maximized. We had 1,500 children just like this fourth, fifth, and sixth grade and central purchasing in the school where the purchasing agent for the school itself. It was a cost center site based run school. The purchasing agent purchased all of the things that were typically bought by teachers at discount and the teachers when they submitted their request. We had our own store. So you could almost immediately satisfy a need and keep the cost very much lower. She also, the purchasing agent, was also able to strike a deal with Beckley-Cardy. They eliminated their shipping and handling, which was 8% and gave us a 40% discount on most items because of the volume of things that we bought from them alone. That does not happen here. It's not centralized at all like that. Good teachers are forced to use either state contract vendors or they have to go out to bid, a very slow process here for a school this size and very often will pay a higher price than they would pay if they went to Staples. The small school might be more able to achieve that kind of savings. So I don't know if that would wash or not, but I think that there is tremendous expense that doesn't need to happen, a lot of duplication of purchase. So economy of scale works only if someone is in charge of it and maximizes it.

CB: WHAT IS LOST WITH REGARD TO ECONOMY OF SCALE BEING THAT THERE IS A MUCH LARGER BUILDING YOU CAN HOUSE A LARGER NUMBER OF STUDENTS. WHAT IS LOST FOR STUDENTS?

Respondent #19:

Well, I think that schools are not factories. We are not here to process children from kindergarten through twelfth grade. We are not a pass through agency. We should latch onto children when they arrive in kindergarten and see them through as personally as possible when they graduate. Somebody should be watching the child that knows the child and schools are not about sort of filling children's minds with data and also I think we need to focus on the person of the child. It is nearly impossible here to achieve. It was nearly impossible to achieve in the last school that I was that was a very large school. It is not automatic in a small school that will happen, but there an instructional leader could make a tremendous difference by setting a tone, by having a wall-less school with the community that is small also to have open door policies and everyone knows everyone. That I think is a gift to children. I think what we are teaching children here by example is, I am a cog in a wheel and I have to fit and I am going to be more like everyone to survive. Whereas in a small school where I worked, you know the child and you can develop the child personally and individually. It is saddening to me to realize that this is the 40th day of school and I bet I know 45 to 50 kids of the 1,500 by name. If I were in my son's school with 300 some kids, I mean that is already one-sixth. Here it is one-thirtieth. I will never know everybody and that is sad and I don't know the parents by name. I don't know who belongs here and who doesn't belong here. If they look like an adult, I assume that they are a parent, I don't know. So what is lost is the humanity of the thing. There is little humanity. Pockets of humanity in the classrooms where teachers do know their kids well. Maybe if two teachers work together, those kids are known by two people, but they are not known by many people. For example, you take the art teacher. Almost like a factory, kids show up every forty-five minutes and she works with groups of children, not children, groups of children to do a project, to have them explore their artistic side and their creative side and forty minutes later it is over. A new group comes in and they may know some children and some children identify themselves as having particular gifts or interests or talents, but they are not going to be developing the individual skills of children. It is going to be a group. I hear that very often when the middle school principal talks. It is a smattering of things, which is what you can offer people. It is very sad and the children really want to know people. They think they know you, but I don't know them and I have no idea where they come from what's their particular what do they want to do, what do they like unless they are in my room. So I think there is a tremendous personal and human loss and there is a cost to this arrangement to have a school of 1,500 very young children. This is a human cost that is not worth the economy of scale it provides in my opinion. Such that I know that I would not want to be the principal of this place because it is really opposed to my philosophy. What I have is a management job. It is an industrial model and I am a manager and I get that, but it's not me. So if I am looking for a job, I am looking for a position in a place that is under 500 children where I can know people.

Respondent #20:

Reduce our production cost by increasing the size of our facility gosh if that development goes through we'll find out won't we? That is the first thing that comes to mind. No, I don't think so because there's just a piece that's missed. We have this little schoolhouse where we have primary students on one-side and middle school students on another. Out in that little wonderful

1929 building, we have fourth and fifth graders. It's like a right of passage. There's a primary hallway and then you go to the big building out there and then you come back here. To grow, reduce our costs? I don't know what the government wants to do is combine the small schools? There would just be so much lost. You still have to; I don't know how they would save. I think what I believe those people in those positions believe is that the superintendent is someone who just comes in, signs his or her name, the board meetings, signs the bills and does both those paperwork pieces. That's really not how it happens in small districts. A superintendent in a large district said one time to me and this was to a Princeton group that I was at, she said, you know so much more than I do. I looked at her and I'm thinking, I don't think so. You have this big job in Princeton. She said, yes, but I know what my job is and I have people who know what all the other jobs are. You live everyday. I have to know transportation. I have to know Special Education. I have to know the budget because I do it all. I don't have anybody to do all those things and you are so highly accountable you have to be a piece of that. To combine superintendents, you still have to have an instructional leader in the building. So somebody has to be at the helm. You have the Assistant Principal here then would have to be a Principal and would need to work 12 months. So there would be an increase. I honestly don't see where there would be a savings unless someone could show me that there is a district that there really is a superintendent who just sits and signs the documents and puts this together and that piece of paper. My kids know when I am not in the hallways. I know when I am not in the hallways. I feel it. So I honestly can't see that by increasing the size of the facility that our production costs would go down because there would be still costs that would be in some line item because someone has to do the job.

Respondent #21:

We did many of the same things that most small schools did such as the bulk buying of paper and supplies. I think economy of scale has its limitations too. I mean you can only do so much and with a small school, we did go in with other districts for buying fuel and I think we also looked at buying electricity that way as well.

Question 10

What organizational practices would you recommend to promote more effective and efficient small schools?

Respondent #1:

I think again it is the question of being creative and besides being creative within your district is working with other districts. They have what they call a jointure as far as transportation costs for special education. They will have one bus that may cover three or four school districts that are going to an outside tuition based school where they actively for the transportation that is available to them. The constant answer is creativity. They have to utilize the resources available that they don't have in house that they have to go next door to the other school districts and utilize what resources they have. That is very common in the county. It is working together basically.

Respondent #2:

I just think with small schools especially in the CSA environment, um I think the leadership factor is important in that a lot of time when you are in a bigger district and you sit in the ivory tower and you just don't have any ideas of what is going on as well as they don't know up there, when you are in a smaller district you have a lot more time even though you are restrained. You have a lot more time to spend with the teachers and the kids and you should never lose sight that you are a teacher. I mean I try to get in the classroom as much as I can. Most of the time I disrupt the class and fool around but you still need to get in and because once you lose sight of that fact, I think you lose the whole perspective of what your leadership role is. And unfortunately in a bigger district, that is what happens. You have a big district with six or seven or eight schools as a superintendent, how often do you get out to the classrooms? How often do you get out to the teachers? You have an assistants to do that or curriculum people. So I think the value of a small district and the research will show that small districts are successful, you know that, is that you still have an opportunity to stay engaged with what is going on with the kids.

Respondent #3:

Well, I think a K-8 district works the best in my estimation. I know a lot of the inner city schools are going back to that to have a family base. I think the kids need to feel like they are part of a family and somebody knows them well and the expectations are the same from year to year. You are not fighting with new expectations. I think it helps us because they have a number of the same special area teachers from year to year. So the teacher is not going to change the expectations from year to year. They'll expect more from you, but as far as attitude, of focus, participation, really doing the best that you can. Those are all characteristics and attributes that we sort of engrain in them. The same as the Steps of Respect. The Respect program we start in kindergarten and run all the way up through eighth grade. They can list for you exactly what we expect from them and if you are consistent and fair with the discipline, if you are honest and open with them, and treat them with respect. You also need to gain that trust with the parents. They trust you to do the best with their kids. Sometimes you have to be an advocate for the kid against the parent, because professionally you know that's better for the kid

and you have to stand up for that and you have to take your lumps with it and nine times out of ten, in the end the parent will come back and thank you. When you are in the process, you say why didn't I just give in, but you know in your heart it's not the best thing for the kid to do that. I think our Total Quality Management makes everybody a partner in it. When we sit down and we meet, the teachers meet. We have Student Council members there. The Vice President and President of the Student Council is there. We have PTO President there. We have people from the community. We have other parents who are there. We have the secretary there, not as the secretary, but to represent the support staff. We have a custodian representing the custodians. We have the Business Administrator. So we have a large group of about 15 to 20 people and we really look at issues and concerns. The other piece that we do, we do the grade level meetings for the teachers on a weekly basis and we do our faculty meetings on a monthly basis with the whole faculty. We do custodial meetings on a monthly basis with all the custodians. We secretarial meetings on a monthly basis. So every piece of the pie we meet with and we communicate with and we value their responses and if anybody is going to be affected by a decision, we involve them in the process or if they have expertise in that if they are not going to be affected, we involve them in the process. So they know that they are valued and respected. If you look at the building, you would think that somebody had kept this like their home and that's the custodians' doing. It's not my standing over them, clean that corner and clean that corner, because it's not. The work that the secretaries do. When we meet with them, they know what has to be done. They know the flow. I often say that my support staff makes all the administrators look good. You know they really do. We work together as a team. It's not a top down organization. In this community, that would not work. The other piece with the teachers is that once an idea is shared, it is shared with all. It's not my idea and you can't have it so the teacher's schedule, they have between four and five prep periods a week that are common times for them. They are expected to plan together and they submit their curriculum mapping for the quarter. They submit one sheet for every subject they do as a team, not as an individual. So they have to plan together, teach together, implement together. It doesn't mean you have to be on the same page, but the kids are getting basically the same content. There is continuity. I have high expectations of them and of ourselves and the community has high expectations for us.

Respondent #4:

Well, I think that District C is the perfect example of what you know if you want to survive as a small school you really have to be creative in your thinking and you really have to take advantage of every grant opportunity there could be out there. The School Choice program that came along was probably the greatest thing for District C because you already have the infrastructure in place and the way that the School Choice program works is we looked at each of our grade levels grades K through eight and we see the number of slots that are available. Let's say for instance in the third grade if we 26 students in our third grade, we are at capacity. We couldn't take any students in third grade, but in our sixth grade if we have 13 students, we could probably fill 7 slots in the sixth grade. Now when you take in these students, you are not increasing your fuel costs. You are not increasing your teacher expenses because you already have a teacher there. Is it to say that you are not going to be spending any more money in your budget by taking on these extra kids? That would be foolish not to think that but that is the way to go to try to always be conscious of saving money and doing the right thing in terms of providing a thorough and efficient education, but the challenges are becoming greater and greater

for school districts to continue to survive and as I said and I hate to keep repeating it but with the latest legislation. I mean with a school district like District C if they took a look at the salary of the business administrator and the building principal and the superintendent and considered them to be administration fees, they may exceed their 2.5% and if they exceed that then what you are going to have to do is you are going to have to share a business administrator with another district, which means you'll have the BA only for maybe two and a half days as opposed to five days. So this is why I think before it gets forced upon you, you need to be looking at maybe partnering with a neighboring smaller district to keep the idea of a smaller district, but maybe partnering with another smaller district to provide a world-class K through 3 program and then a world-class middle school program and that would be my recommendation if you want to keep it small. Partner and consider establishing a sending receiving relationship with a neighboring smaller district. You could still be small, but you would be two districts then. I think smaller districts are going to have to think that if they want to continue to survive or else they are just going to begin to go belly up. They really are. I mean we've got a district that had to take a loan and as collateral they used their textbooks. They used as collateral with the bank their textbooks. Now to me that is unconscionable that you would get to that point that you would have to do something like that, but these are the kind of dire straits that they were in. I mean they had a student that was classified and it was an out of district placement and the tuition and the transportation for the student was running close to \$200,000 a year. They didn't have the money. They didn't have the money in their fund balance going into the year to be ready for this. So they went to the township and tried to secure a loan. The township wasn't going to help them. The president went to bank and they took a loan and used their textbooks as collateral.

Respondent #5:

We're lucky here because parents are really, really involved and I think for the school to operate effective and efficiently, the parents have to be on the same wavelength as the staff and not through me, I can't take credit for that, because like I said I have only been here for a year, but the staff is very well established and the parents seem to connect real well. I did hire a new kindergarten teacher who sort of followed suit as the other kindergarten teacher. We had the ability to go each person's house of the new students. You would never have that ability in a larger district, even in a middle size district you wouldn't have that ability and that connection where the students came in the first day was as smooth as can be. Those students came in know the teacher and knowing where to go. She even brought them to the school for orientation and she was hired late in the year because we were strapped with other things, but it worked out as well as anybody could have ever wanted it to.

Respondent #5:

To have a relationship with the superintendent the way I have with our shared superintendent is incredible. Had it been anybody else, I don't know how that would have worked out. To be really honest with that piece of it, I have worked with other superintendents and did not have a relationship the way I have with our shared superintendent. She will come here in a second and sit down with me and go over things. Having said that, she also has allowed me room to do whatever I wanted to do. When I needed to have her here, she's here. When I don't, she lets me have my space. We also share services with our neighboring district as far as Director of Special Services and the Business Administrator and those two individuals have been extremely helpful because they are another two areas that as principal or even as an administrator you don't deal

with. Um, the experiences with the business administrator and what I have to go through with each one of those grants and budget is phenomenal. We used to do the billing here. Our neighboring district has now taken that over. So that takes the responsibility away from the secretary who wears another set of different hats too.

CB: SO REALLY YOU HAVE THE QUALITY THAT EVEN THOUGH THE SERVICES ARE OFF SITE, THE QUALITY AND THE TIMING FOR WHEN YOU NEED THOSE SERVICES IS THERE?

Respondent #5:

At the fingertip. Had it not worked out that way, I am taking into consideration personality traits, seem to very much fuse and connect or I can see in my experiences where there is no one upmanship here. This is an extremely well working relationship that has to do a lot with personalities and knowledge. Every one of those people that I just mentioned to you have experience and knowledge that we share and we go back and forth. We're lucky. Had it been different, the whole outlook would have been different.

Respondent #6:

Well I would certainly want the principals to have major responsibility for the budget. I would want to the degree possible that the principal has measured control over all of the accounts for his or her school that they be given an allocation and the freedom, even to the point of say I will have one less teacher, but I'll have two teacher aids. In other words, I think they should have wide flexibility in the whole educational process and where they see they don't need an extra janitor or they do need an extra janitor where they need one less teacher and two less aids, they should have latitude on personnel. Remember personnel is probably up to 93% of the budget. Certainly it's in the high eighties if you fold in health card and so forth. So I think if the principal is asked to produce a certain level of achievement that the kids learn, he should have the ability to select a mix of instructional personnel to get the best efficiency.

CB: HOW DO YOU FIND 1701?

Respondent #6:

1701 could be a problem.

Respondent #7

I think we need to publicize more. There needs to be more awareness on the part of the public that small schools are making a huge difference and we are not making a good job of doing that. A lot of the articles that you see if you pick up journals in education are written and they really highlight a lot of what the larger school districts are accomplishing and the smaller districts you don't read that much about the smaller districts and there is a reason for it. The people in the small districts are so busy working that they don't have time to write these articles. They don't have time to promote themselves, but I think that people need to make the time in order to do that. I know that in my career I try to get published at least once a year. And whether I was in a small district or a large district. I think it is important that you be able to share what you've learned with your colleagues and I think small school districts need to get out there otherwise

they are not going to survive. There are so many great things that are occurring in small districts and so many great victories that there's a lot to write about.

Respondent #8:

We do a unit leader thing here where there is a Principal here and a Curriculum Coordinator. Besides that from K to 2 and then from 3 to 5, and 6 to 8 we have unit leaders and those teachers meet with me on a monthly basis and we talk about issues that go on specific to their unit or specifically to the school. Then they take that back with their unit. So those nine or ten teachers they work together to do things like K to 2. Then if there is an issue or problem, they come back and when we meet monthly, they'll say well we're having an issue about maybe discipline or maybe how the buses are coming in or out or what time lunch is. Things that really pertain to them, but they need sort of a sounding board to get back out and instead of running to the administration, they just go to their unit leader who represents them. They either come to me or the Principal, talk to us about them or when we meet in groups, we hash that out together with the other unit leaders because it might be a problem that we find that it is common to the whole school. So, it's a good way for the units to meet and talk about things. Also, they share what happens at workshops so if we send two second grade teachers out to a workshop that pertains to K to 2 teachers, they would present that at their unit meeting what they learned and either encourage others to go or actually bring the information back and teach them.

CB: SO IT IS SIMILAR TO THE LEAD TEACHER IDEA?

Respondent #8:

In a way. We call them unit leaders and they are compensated for that a little bit in their contract. Organizationally it works out because you don't really a Vice Principal and you don't need curriculum coordinators. I mean you don't need department chairs. Things like that and in a sense it works that way.

CB: HOW MANY DO YOU HAVE?

Respondent #8:

We have five.

CB: FIVE PER GRADE LEVEL, FIVE CLASSES?

Respondent #8:

Oh, how many classes per grade level? We have three sections per grade level. So they represent like at least nine people.

Respondent #12:

I think the first thing you need is common sense. I don't know how you teach that. People either have it or they don't. You absolutely have to have common sense and you have to be willing to think along the lines of what we have talked about since you've interviewed us. We constantly are talking about ways we can save some money and deciding whether it's a good way to propose it to the board. You know, where do we go with this idea. I think you just have to do that. You have to be willing to do that. You have to invest the time to do it. You can't shut the

job off when you go home. I have a 45-minute ride and I'm still processing stuff as I go home writing notes down. You get people to buy in to what you are doing. Not just your staff, but the community at large and know what you are doing is the right thing and believing it yourself. If you do that, things work out, people will pitch in, will build you a playground. They will pump out your basement. You know those things will happen because people care and if you demonstrate you care, then you build that sense of community. So without a sense of community, this school couldn't function, most schools couldn't at all but because there is one and it is a strong one, it is really the glue that binds you and that is what you need to do. I don't know that there is a textbook way to do that. I think it is somebody's personality, it's their vision, but then you also have to be able to make it real. Everybody's personality develops their own way to think that way. DA does it one way and I do it another way and other people in other districts do it another way. You just have to find out what that is.

Respondent #12:

The other thing is the philosophy. The pat answer to that is that you have to have that philosophy. If you don't have that philosophy, you're not a right match. You need to work some place else, because people instinctively know that about you and you won't last long here or any other small school.

Respondent #13:

I think another thing. Everything that he said and more so one of the things they asked me in my interview when I came here is, how important do you think communication is? I think that it is important and that's one of the answers they wanted to hear. Especially with the board, and one thing is that I come from a community where some of the members of the board are teachers. One of the board members actually sued the board and you know here it is like a family. I mean it is you call the members by name and I called one member by Mr. Doe the first time I met him and he said that's my father. My name is John, you know and he keeps them informed. They know what's going on. They know as soon as we get 20 inches of water, the president of the board knows 10 minutes after he knows. But the board is terrific too. I tell you in a small community and I know in a larger community because I have had direct experience, but I don't know why it is but you get some of these crusaders come in from larger communities and they've got an agenda and they come in and they say I'm going to change things because I think this is better and it may or may not be bad. Maybe it is only a little bit broken and not a lot broken, but they are going to turn it upside down. Here the people come in and they trust the administration. They trust him because they have confidence in him. So they say what do you recommend and he says we should do this for this reason and they say, hum sounds like a rational approach to me; let's do it. You know some of the administration and I've seen this have said I'm going to do this. Absolutely not when the board says no way. Here the board is terrific. The Board of Education is seven really great people. People who care a lot about the community and care a lot about the school and who have a lot of trust in us. It makes me feel good because they do that. I have a lot of people checking me in a larger district you know. It's not the case here. If I mess up, it is my fault, you know, not because of anything else.

Respondent #13:

That is not to say that we don't get crabby. We get crabby around here a lot lately. But people understand and it's a great job and it makes it fun to do the stuff.

Respondent #14:

Well, I know the push at the state level is to look at the position of the superintendent of schools and to have that position shared and you can do that. You can probably, as one of the legislators maybe five or six years ago recommended that all of the county become one district with one superintendent much like they do in Florida with the county system or Hawaii. As long as you have people at the local building level orchestrating the issues that need to be dealt with on a daily basis, it doesn't really matter what you call them. In my position, I worked as the building principal. I work as the superintendent and I also work as the director of the child study team, which are all nice titles, but it means I just do a lot of different types of orchestration in facilitating. One time it is with a group of teachers. Another time it is with a group of board members. Another time it is with the child study team members and other schools that can help us with, you know, meet the needs of kids. So, I think it is a real manpower issue and it might be worth a try to look at a different type of organizational pattern with respect to that. What are you going to say? Are you going to say the cost of superintendents, and the I think the average salary of superintendents is \$120,000 in the state now. I am well below that, but you know, you can't always go around comparing yourself to what other people make. You would always be unhappy, because somebody would be making more money than you. You have to look for different types of satisfaction that you get in your job and the satisfaction I get in this job is that I see my kids everyday. When I was the assistant superintendent for personnel in Trenton, I had oversight of five schools and all I dealt with were attorneys and union leaders. I had eleven different unions that I had to respond to with the Trenton Public school system and I had oversight of five schools and I never got out of central office to get to the five schools. I couldn't get out of there. I was constantly dealing with some critical issue. When you think back as to why you got into education, you get into education to be able to work with children, because it is so rewarding. I like to tell the story of my daughter who I thought would be a wonderful kindergarten teacher and nobody ever listens to their father. So, she was going to be a theatrical star and she went to Montclair and went to the performing arts school and graduated and worked as a travel agent and did extremely well at that. She traveled the world and got involved in some community theater, and then took a job as Spanish teacher at the elementary, at a large district in Ocean county. We are having dinner one day and she said daddy, I hate to say this, but you were right. I really love teaching and I said what do you like about it Jess, and she said I feel like I make a difference and you do. You make a difference in somebody else's life. On the scale of compensation from one to ten, that has got to be the most rewarding, to make a positive impact on somebody else's life. I meet kids that I taught forty years ago and they still remember me. Whether it is good or bad, God only knows, but still have that impact on somebody and that is worthwhile.

CB: EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENY SMALL SCHOOLS? ONE OF THE IDEAS OF SHARED SERVICES OF THE SUPERINTENDENT, HAS THAT BEEN A CONCERN?

Respondent #15:

It was a concern. Actually when we had a chief school administrator the concern was, you know a chief school administrator is the principal/superintendent and probably a whole bunch of other

things that they have to do in a smaller district, but they are responsible for going to county superintendent meetings and superintendent roundtables and things like that so often they are pulled from the district and we would be left with no one here supervising and so we now by having a building principal who is out a lot less frequently, we have someone here day-to-day and I think from a parent's standpoint, their feeling was just seeing someone in charge out there in the morning or in the afternoon occasionally walking around just gives them a sense that their children are being supervised. Everyone is being watched. The school is being managed and not just running amuck on its own. Some of it was perception more than reality because I think the school was really doing well prior to this change in terms of it being run, but there was definitely a desire from the community's standpoint of having more of a presence someone there more often. You know, part of being in a small community is there are a lot of eyes watching and so you know when a car is not in a lot, the car is in the lot, everybody takes notice of those things and that is the down side of a small community and things get passed quickly and things that are not necessarily true can get spread very quickly in a small community.

Respondent #16:

I think we are doing those all and I don't know how much further we can go. There really aren't too many other things. I know that one of the things is sharing of a chief school administrator. Um, the research that we have done on that doesn't really show that you save that much if anything, but that is something that could be looked into. Also combining with other school districts small districts together but again that is sometimes deceiving too. It sounds like it works, but when you actually get down to the pencil and paper it isn't. In 2000 before we did our project before we applied for funds, the region attempted to do a regionalization. We thought that maybe we could take our middle schoolers and put them somewhere else and cut costs by not having it. Well, we found that not every district wanted to do that. It was home rule and they wanted to have control and so they back out of the project and I understand since I'm only here nine years, I understand that was about the fifth time that it was suggested and investigated and similarly failed. So what is the answer? I don't know. To me it's more of an issue state wide than what we are individually doing and I think that is where it has to come from and what they are doing now is just a sneaky way to cut out the smaller schools that are functioning by the way and District M has done so well actually two years running we were listed as number three in the state for our scores. Our kids just did so fabulously and it is because of that approach that small-individualized approach that for our kids makes a difference.

Respondent #17:

I think first of all its a whole PR kind of a thing. I think that again as I said before, people who are involved in a small school from the parent point of view, you know, are very supportive of the concept. I think that because a lot of the advantages of the small school are intangibles, I think that the PR part of it has to be. I mean you really need to have community outreach, to get your community to show the community especially community members that are not parents what the advantages are. What's happening in our school and I think that then the community will support that school financially and support it with just their moral support. You know we love having this resource in our community.

Respondent #18:

Well, effective I would say increasing communication, having those conversations with teachers and encouraging them to have the conversations about learning. Not just conversations, but addressing it toward achievement and towards curriculum. I think organizationally what was here for many years was kind of a top-down and I am more of a bottom-up person, which is a little shocking to them and for the first month or so over the summer you could tell they just weren't used to it, but they are liking it and they're feeling a little more relaxed now and able to see that you can be just as effective without that dogmatic. In fact you can be more effective I think when you are relaxed and comfortable and like coming to work. Encouraging them to be part of the conversation, which they never really were. You know things that they would ask me. Just this morning, the woman doing the assembly was late getting here because she got lost and I just made a general announcement, instead of starting at 8:30, we're going to start at 9:30. Bring your children to the gym at 9:30. About 9:33, the buzzer rings and someone asks, are you going to call us down? No, I told you to come at 9:30 and you know, my expectation is that they are all professionals and they all reach for the bar and that is where it is. If I find it other than that then I will address that, but for the most part um, I think 99% of them are hitting it and each in their own way maybe someone does it differently and that might not be considered as showy or as wonderful, but they still are doing it. So honoring their diversity and having it come from them to me is the most productive so that is how I have always flourished the best, so I figured they will too.

Respondent #19:

I think effective is almost easy to achieve in a smaller school. A person who is an instructional leader in a small school can make that school effective. It is easier to meet for most of the children the objectives that you have established for them and you would know by the way if you did do that because you know the children. So the effective part of that question I think, is not automatic by nearly so for small schools because there is clarity of purpose. There are fewer people to get it wrong. For example, the staff here I should say there are 90 some certificated staff members in this building alone. So effective, that is hardly effective. If you want to get a message out to 90 some people, it takes weeks really to make it clear to them and have some one-on-one with some people who aren't getting it. With a small school, I could have a meeting in this office. We have to meet in the cafeteria and use the microphone so that is not good. But efficient would be the challenge for a small school because you have even in a small group children very diverse needs and particular needs that requires them by law specific interventions, which are expensive to achieve because personnel is the biggest cost. If you were in some sort of relationship, for example parochial schools in New Jersey are entitled to shared services with the public schools in the same district at no cost to them. So I am wondering if there may be a consortium of schools rather than a regionalization where you legally tie people together. Just an agreement, in fact we did this with the Latin teacher here. We needed three-fifths of a Latin teacher and the district one town over needed two-fifths of a Latin teacher so we created a situation where that person would start there because it was closer to his house and then we rearranged our schedule so that the Latin met in the afternoon and he came in the afternoon. He had an hour before he taught. He taught three classes and then he went home and he received compensation from both districts. So that is an example. I don't think we do that with anybody else, but there is no reason that you can't. A small school trying to achieve more for example, the offering of elementary world languages for a small school. You can't just hire a person to

teach 300 children in a day. It is hard so if we could make an arrangement with a similarly size school, they aren't so removed. I think that would be another place to do it. Basic Skills would be another place to do such a thing and you know without legally binding ourselves with one another I think you can achieve the same thing. If there is a willingness to do it and there is an openness on the part of the people who can make it happen such as your human resources person, which in a small school system might be the principal anyway. So it is doable and it worked well I would say. It save us \$10,000 and save the other district \$30,000 to do that. So it was worth it.

Respondent #20:

We're trying as a cluster to do more things together to try to pull some resources. For instance, last principal at District K we worked together closely to try to have some kind of a professional development and I'll use the term school where we pulled some of our talented staff and we offered programs so that anyone in the cluster wouldn't have to pay and could go to that. Most recently, we have been talking about maybe specializing in certain areas of Special Education. So instead of sending our children really out of district, at least this way they would be amongst kids that they would end up going to high school with and that is a space issue. Right now I rent two classrooms out. I do have two rooms. I had three last year, but then took one back for children I needed another Special Education service. I had to take one class back because I had a need here for a multiple disabilities classroom very, very important. So now I get rent for two classrooms. Maybe I should take another classroom back and then if there are other districts looking at our neighboring districts again, what are our Special Education needs because it won't cost, as much to keep kids within, plus it is the right thing to do. So that is another thing we do look at.

CB: WHOM DO YOU RENT TO?

Respondent #20:

District Y Special Services. It is a county Special Services school district. There costs have become rather high so we can do it for much less and then they come to the district as well. We also do curriculum together. Somebody takes the lead. It has been me in the last couple of years working with District K, District Z, and District R trying to find key people and then take charge of the curriculum writing that happens in the summer to make sure that the articulation is complete. So that is another thing that we do to work together. Those are probably the biggest issues and we've seen relationships evolve more over the last couple of years than had been the practice in the past because we are trying to get things together. If I have a specialist come here in the area of literacy for example, I have opened it up at no cost to other districts and they are trying to do the same thing. We can't send as many people or we can't have as many of their staff come, but at least it is something and that's certainly how you lead to best practices and all of us doing the same thing because our kids do go to the high school.

CB: IS THIS AT THE COUNTY LEVEL?

Respondent #20:

It is just our cluster that sends to District R. We are trying to do some of those things to cut costs and to work together.